OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE CODEMASTERS GAME?

DARRAN JONES

It was always going to be a *Dizzy* game for me, and *Fantasy World Dizzy* is arguably the best one in the series.
Expertise: Juggling a beautiful wife, two gorgeous daughters and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *Seasons After Fall*
Favourite game of all time: *Strider*

TIM EMPEY

I mention it later, but *Micro Machines V4* got a whole lot of play during lunchtimes when I was on *Play*. It's great fun.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go
Currently playing: *Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare*
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

ANDY SALTER

Going to be a tie between *Micro Machines* on the Mega Drive and *Psycho Pinball* on PC although I only ever played the demo.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently modding: *RTR: Imperium Surrectum*
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War* although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now

MARTYN CARROLL

Lots of fond memories playing the *Dizzy* games on my Spectrum, but I'll go for *Micro Machines V3* on the PlayStation. Such a polished and playable game.
Expertise: Sinclair stuff
Currently playing: *Banjo-Kazooie*
Favourite game of all time: *Jet Set Willy*

RORY MILNE

Dizzy? *TOCA*? *Colin McRae*? I can't decide! OK, *Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament*, just because I have such good memories of multiplayer sessions back in the Nineties.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Atic Atac*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*

ANDREW FISHER

TOCA Championship Racing on the PlayStation – superb racing game, really showed what the PlayStation could do.
Expertise: Forty-five years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing: *Dracula: Dark Reign*
Favourite game of all time: *Wizball*

PAUL ROSE

Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament on the Mega Drive. Thanks to the J-Cart, sheer multiplayer madness.
Expertise: Winging it
Currently playing: *Assassin's Creed Valhalla*
Favourite game of all time: *Half-Life 2*

GRAEME MASON

Its first, *BMX Simulator*, on the Spectrum. Great colours, and cool multiplayer gameplay. All for £1.99!
Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver.
Currently playing: *Flesh Made Fear*
Favourite game of all time: *Resident Evil 4*

LOADING...

Coming from a one-parent family meant that new games were often a commodity my mum couldn't justify. I'd often buy budget games with the pocket money I occasionally received, but they weren't always very good. That changed with Codemasters as I was rarely disappointed with its games and they often seemed to score well in *Amstrad Action*. After falling in love with *Dizzy*, I decided to make my life's mission to collect every Codemasters budget game. Only to find that not every title was released on my trusty Amstrad.

My obsession with Codemasters' budget games didn't really last (my obsessions rarely do) but I always kept an eye on its new games and enjoyed the likes of *Psycho Pinball*, *Micro Machines* and later hits like the *Colin McRae* games. It's been fun this issue then to not only look back at 40 of the studio's most interesting releases, but also learn about what it was like working for the company that's still going strong today.

Outside of our excellent Codemasters coverage, we peek behind the curtain of *Colony Wars*, *Marathon* and *Perfect Dark*; celebrate the hard-hitting action of *Super Punch-Out!!*, and discover how *Fish* and *Patapon* were created.

There's plenty more great features in this issue, but I'll let you discover them for yourselves.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

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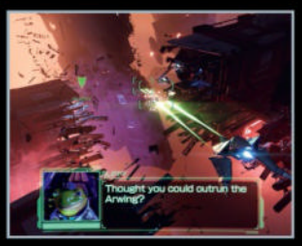

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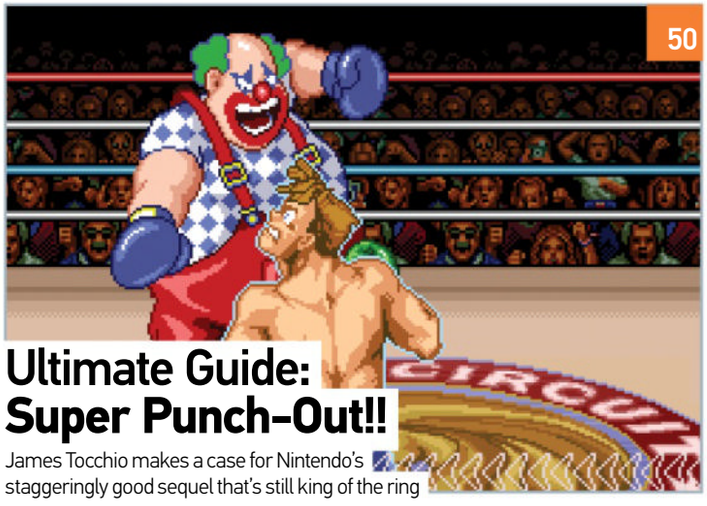

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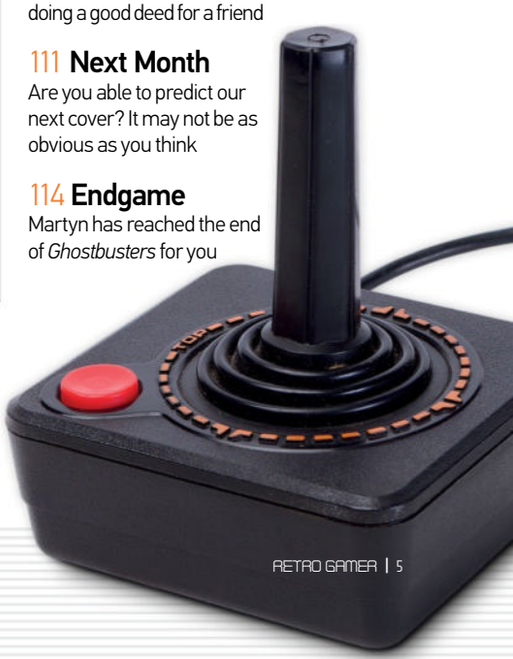
Ultimate Guide: Super Punch-Out!!

James Tocchio makes a case for Nintendo's staggeringly good sequel that's still king of the ring



» [PlayStation 4] Sales data from the Insomniac leaks of four years ago showed that single-player games like *Spider-Man* were selling better on physical than they were on digital.

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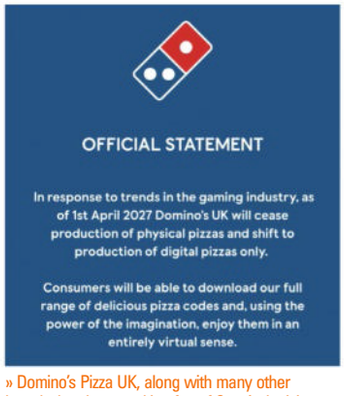

OFFICIAL STATEMENT
In response to trends in the gaming industry, as of 1st April 2027 Domino's UK will cease production of physical pizzas and shift to production of digital pizzas only.
Consumers will be able to download our full range of delicious pizza codes and, using the power of the imagination, enjoy them in an entirely virtual sense.

» Domino's Pizza UK, along with many other brands, has been making fun of Sony's decision to end physical games.

PLAY HAS LIMITS

Sony plans to kill its physical discs and gamers aren't happy

Words by Darran Jones

The death of physical media has been inevitable in gaming for some time now, but it would appear that Sony wants that time to be now. A week after Rockstar revealed that *Grand Theft Auto VI* would arrive on consoles for either £69.99 or £89.99 and would only include a code in a box with physical editions, Sony decided to twist the knife in deeper.

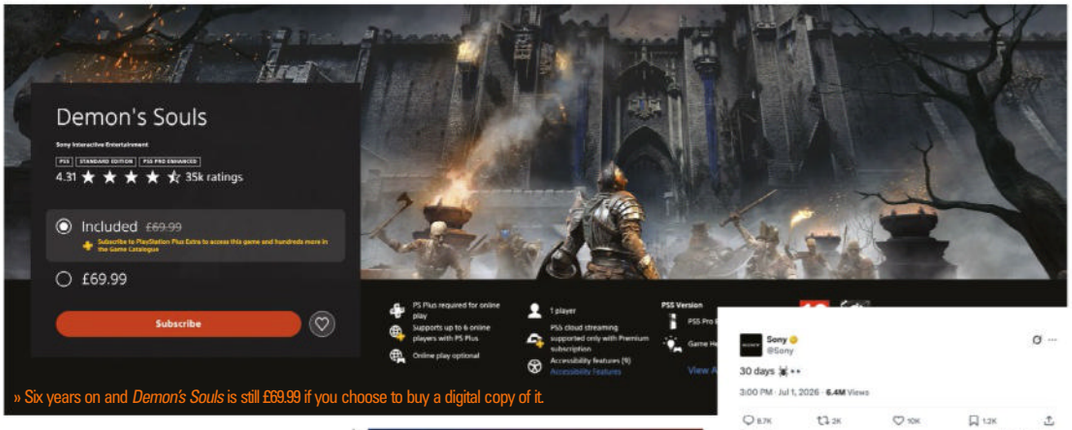
On 1 July it posted the following headline on its blog, "Physical disc production ending in January 2028 for new games on PlayStation consoles." According to Sid Shuman, senior director of Sony Interactive Entertainment content communications, the news is due to being a response to "shifting trends in consumer preferences" and gamers aren't happy about it.

"As consumer preferences and the broader entertainment industry continue to shift away from physical discs to digital, physical game disc production for all new games releasing on PlayStation consoles will be discontinued starting January 2028," his post begins. "Following this date, new games will be available on PlayStation Store and at retailers in digital formats only. This transition has no impact on games that have already released, or will be releasing, prior to January 2028 in disc format."

> "Even if you are happy to buy digital products, nothing good can come from gaming in a purely digital future"

Shuman goes on to say, "This is a natural direction for Sony Interactive Entertainment to adapt to consumer trends as the general preference for digital media significantly outpaces physical discs. This transition will enable us to align more closely with how most of our community prefers to access and play games today. We'll continue to prioritise our resources to drive innovation in how players can access games and provide choices as to where players prefer to purchase new games, whether that's at retailers or PlayStation Store. We remain committed to delivering a world-class gaming experience to our fans and we thank you for your continued support."

It's worth noting that this post came a day after Sony revealed the licences for Studio Canal films would be ending and as a result



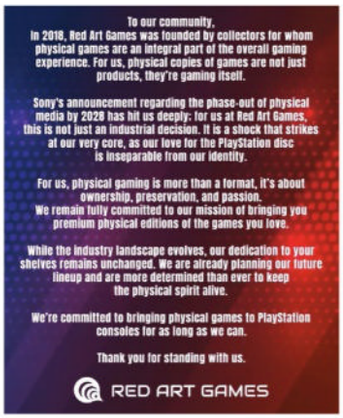
» Six years on and *Demon's Souls* is still £69.99 if you choose to buy a digital copy of it.

over 500 films would be wiped from the store, including from the libraries of people who had already purchased them. It's incredibly poor timing on Sony's part, highlighting that when it comes to digital purchases, you don't have any real rights as a consumer. Sony further unwittingly highlighted the perils of digital ownership by revealing on the same day that the PS3 and PS Vita digital store fronts would finally be closing as well.

Even if you are happy to buy digital products, nothing good can come from gaming in a purely digital future. In a digital future there will be no sharing of your favourite games with friends. Prices will inevitably rise because companies like Sony and Microsoft (which is also apparently planning to go digital-only with its next console) will have no competitors. Licensed games will quickly disappear once their licence period ends and those who rely on second-hand games due to a lack of funds will be effectively cut off from their hobby.

While PC gamers are no strangers to digital-only gaming, there's so much competition within the market that it's easy to find new games below retail prices. It's hard to imagine this happening on consoles when they inevitably start restricting purchases to only their official storefronts.

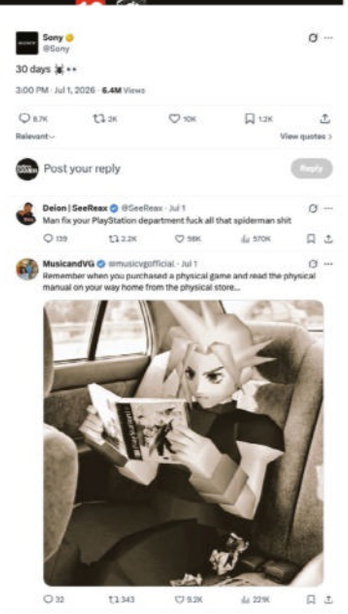
» The petition at change.org to stop Sony killing physical games had over 200,000 signatures as we went to press. We expect that to climb even higher.


To our community,
In 2018, Red Art Games was founded by collectors for whom physical games are an integral part of the overall gaming experience. For us, physical copies of games are not just products, they're gaming itself.
Sony's announcement regarding the phase-out of physical media by 2028 has hit us deeply: for us at Red Art Games, this is not just an industrial decision. It is a shock that strikes at our very core, as our love for the PlayStation disc is inseparable from our identity.
For us, physical gaming is more than a format, it's about ownership, preservation, and passion.
We remain fully committed to our mission of bringing you premium physical editions of the games you love.
While the industry landscape evolves, our dedication to your shelves remains unchanged. We are already planning our future lineup and are more determined than ever to keep the physical spirit alive.
We're committed to bringing physical games to PlayStation consoles for as long as we can.
Thank you for standing with us.
RED ART GAMES

» Companies like Red Art Games that specialise in making physical versions of digital games are adamant Sony's decision won't affect them.

Take the remake of *Demon's Souls* for example, which launched on the PS5 six years ago. It's currently available brand-new from Amazon for £34.99 and much cheaper than that if you go for a second-hand copy, but it's on the PlayStation store for £69.99. Granted, it does get routinely discounted to £35, but will that continue when Sony has no real competition?

As well as being poor for consumers, the news is a harsh blow for those that look to preserve games, with the Video Game History Foundation pointing out that the vast majority of games from the last 20 years were not even pressed to physical media and that the industry needs to be doing more than it currently is to ensure games are preserved for posterity. Its statement concluded that, "The industry needs to meaningfully come to the table on this issue, because asking museums to download a copy of *Grand Theft Auto VI* and hope it'll run in 50 years time is not a preservation solution."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Man fix your PlayStation department fuck all that spiderman shit
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Remember when you purchased a physical game and read the physical manual on your way home from the physical store...

» The backlash when Sony tried to hype its incoming *Spider-Man* movie was so strong it simply stopped making new posts.

As well as infuriating gamers, Sony's blog post has received over 8,500 comments, has initiated various petitions, seen gamers use phrases like "if purchasing isn't 'permanent' ownership, piracy isn't stealing", companies like Domino's Pizza UK, Blaze Entertainment and KFC making light of Sony's situation and even the French presidential candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon pointing out that "tomorrow, you will pay without ever owning anything".

It's obvious that Sony wasn't expecting this news to be taken lightly, but the ferocity with which it has been received will hopefully make it rethink its strategy (if it hasn't by the time you read this). Oh, and remember. If this trend does continue and gets adopted by Microsoft and Nintendo, retro gaming for future generations will die with it, as the youngsters of tomorrow won't have the chance to enjoy their past love of games like we've been able to. That's perhaps the most upsetting thing of all.

DOUBLE FINE STILL FINE

After looking like it would be facing closure from Microsoft, Double Fine Studios has announced it will return to being an independent studio and retain ownership of its IP. Bloomberg also reported that Compulsion will return to being an independent studio, but Ninja Theory and Undead Labs are to be sold off. Arkane Studios is also in trouble and will be sold or spun out. In total 3,200 jobs across the game division are affected, with 1,600 being immediate.

AN UNUSUAL ALBUM

Toronto-based Daydream Plus (the alter ego of Tomb Mold) is doing something unusual for its debut album. In addition to releasing conventionally, *Second Last Day Of Summer* will also be released in chiptune form on a fully functioning NES cartridge. The 12 album tracks have been reconstructed using FamiTracker. Called *Extended Forecast*, it's inspired by the band's love of classic game scores. It's out now at runforcoverrecords.com

Who is Mike Mika?
Mike Mika's official videogame career began in the Nineties, working on Game Boy Color titles like *Klax* and *Alice In Wonderland*. He's now the studio head of Digital Eclipse, a studio acclaimed for its reverential treatment of classic games.

Flow state

I have always been an introvert. I was perfectly happy blending into the background where nobody expected anything from me. Attention was the last thing I wanted. It felt like being attacked. Every pair of eyes felt like another spotlight.

Piano recitals were torture. I'd practice for weeks, play flawlessly at home, then somehow forget how my own fingers worked the moment people were watching. Standing in front of the class wasn't much better. Teachers eventually took pity on me and stopped calling on me. Talking to girls? That required a version of me that simply didn't exist.

Then one afternoon, on an elementary school field trip to the local roller rink, *Q*bert* changed everything.

Like every skating trip, I spent the first hour insisting my ankle hurt so I could avoid roller-skates. When lunch finally came, I escaped to the arcade. There it was: the original *Q*bert* cabinet. I'd played the Commodore 64 version endlessly, but I'd never seen the real thing.

I dropped in a quarter, and everything I'd learned at home translated perfectly. For one brief, glorious moment, I became interesting.

A girl from another school wandered over after I put my initials at the top of the leaderboard. For a kid who could barely say hello, it felt like winning the lottery. She convinced me to buy her a soft pretzel and listened while I breathlessly explained why *Q*bert*'s Escher-like presentation and diagonal controls made it unlike any other game. By the end of lunch, I'd already planned where we were going to grow old together.

The spell lasted exactly until an older kid from my school beat my score. Or maybe it was my non-stop explanation of how the game used a real pinball knocker whenever Q*bert fell off the pyramid.

Wait… am I losing you? Either way, the attention shifted, and so did she. I was yesterday's news.

> "Then one afternoon, on an elementary school field trip to the local roller rink, Q*bert changed everything"

What I eventually discovered was that whenever the conversation turned to games (how they worked, how they were made, how I might build one myself) the anxiety disappeared. I stopped wondering whether I sounded awkward or looked nervous. I wasn't performing anymore. I was simply talking about something I genuinely loved. That realisation followed me into my career.

Years later, before the public unveiling of Digital Eclipse's PSP version of *Death, Jr*, our live demo crashed in rehearsal. We fixed it. It crashed again. Someone from Sony nervously asked, "Will it work OK when we do the real thing?" Minutes before walking onstage in front of five thousand people, there was every reason to believe our biggest public showing was about to become our biggest public embarrassment.

My partner onstage, Chris Charla, shrugged, "It'll work." And we walked out anyway. It worked. Oddly enough, I wasn't thinking about the audience. I wanted people to see what we'd built. My attention had shifted away from myself and onto something bigger than my own nerves.

The same thing had happened even earlier. Right out of college I joined a sales team at Nimax selling one of the first Windows-compatible tablet PCs. They were astonishingly expensive, and most people thought they were impossible to sell.

Instead of delivering a sales pitch, I'd load up *Doom* and hand the tablet to prospective customers. Suddenly we weren't talking about cash registers anymore. We were talking about processors, graphics, memory and operating systems. People became curious. Without realising it, I became one of the company's top salespeople. Not because I loved selling, but because I loved talking about technology.

Looking back, I don't think games cured my social anxiety; they simply gave me something I loved more than being afraid. Since those piano recitals, I've presented games, pitched publishers, led meetings, and spoken in front of thousands of people. The frightened kid is still in there somewhere. He just gets very quiet whenever we start talking about games. *

Do you agree with Mike's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK | retrogamermag.bsky.social | @RetroGamer_Mag | retrogamer@futurenet.com

» [Arcade] Howell was involved in a number of games while working at Sega, including *Virtua Fighter*.

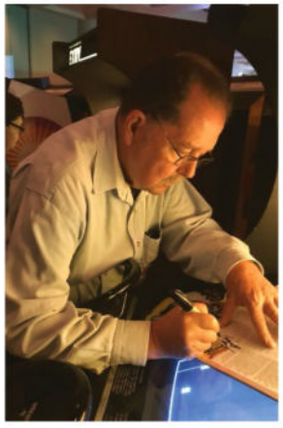
HOWELL IVY PASSES

PAYING TRIBUTE TO A GAMING PIONEER

We were recently informed about the sad passing of gaming pioneer Howell Ivy by regular freelancer Paul Drury. Paul has spoken to Howell for this magazine several times in the past and was contacted by Howell's widow, Christine who sent a heartfelt email to the journalists who had interviewed Howell over the years. "I knew Howell for nearly 50 years, was married to him for 44 of those – and yet, as I read your articles, listen to your podcasts, or watch a video where you interviewed him… I have learned things that I did not know before."

Howell Ivy was born on 19 March 1946 to the late Royal Ivy and Marcellia Ivy. Growing up in Norcross Georgia, he developed an early love of engineering which led to him going to Georgia Tech. A year later he decided to join the US Air Force where he worked as an educator and on drone systems operations and missile instrumentation.

After transferring to Sunnyvale's Air Force Satellite Control Facility he saw an early demo of *Computer Space* and vowed to make something similar. After creating his own variation of *Pong*, which was able to move backwards and forwards as well as up and down, he was hired on the spot by Ramtek. After creating several games for Ramtek, which included *Blockade* and *Clean Sweep*, Howell wanted fresh challenges and cofounded Exidy where he worked on over 20 games. This was a fertile time for the arcade industry and Howell produced numerous titles, such as *Mouse Trap*, *Chiller* and *Venture*. Many of Howell's early games were pioneering in their own right; *Crossbow* was the first optical lightgun game, while



» Howell Ivy started his gaming career at Ramtek, cofounded Exidy and eventually moved to Sega Of America where he became CEO.

» A smart-looking picture of Howell when he was stationed at Lowry Air Force Base.

» *Death Race* was causing controversy in arcades long before the likes of *Mortal Kombat* were conceived.

Death Race proved to be controversial long before the likes of *Mortal Kombat* and *Night Trap*.

After working at Exidy, Howell joined Sega Of America and found great success there. In just under two decades of service he became president and later CEO and would oversee numerous classic games, from *Sega Rally* and *Virtua Tennis* to *Streets Of Rage* and *Virtua Fighter*. He would later retire and ended up volunteering at Valley Christian Schools as an engineer instructor. Over 1,000 students were able to send their science projects to the International Space Station due to his hard work and dedication.

Christine explained to us that Howell caught COVID in late-2022 and his health soon declined. Despite his illness, he continued to work, but he never fully recovered and peacefully passed on 22 May, surrounded by his loving family.

The arcade industry would have been a very different place without pioneers like Howell and he leaves an impressive legacy behind him, one that goes far beyond the world of videogames. Our thoughts go out to all of Howell's friends and family during this very difficult time and we appreciate the insight into Howell's life and many photos that his family kindly shared.

PHONE HOME

The recent announcement of Commodore's new Callback phone may be dividing Commodore fans, but it seems to be working its magic for the company. After dropping the price by $100 and releasing various statements about its reasoning for making an app-restricted phone, Commodore has revealed it has matched the first month's sales of its Commodore 64 Ultimate in just three days. You can order the $400 phone from commodore.net

WORMS GET UPDATED

Worms creator Andy Davidson recently revealed that his planned free Amiga update for *Worms: The Director's Cut* will be arriving 7 August. The new expansion will feature 40 new custom levels, over 50 sample sets and will include 10 new landscape types. He's even hinted that a physical boxed edition could be a possibility as well. Needless to say, it's a good time to be a *Worms* fan.

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine

This could be our year

1982 was the best year ever and I can prove it. Don't get me wrong; I'm certainly not one of those people that looks back in time and reminisces about an age that never actually happened. The Seventies, Eighties, Nineties, in fact all of the years, were much more rubbish than 2026. Now obviously sucks but so did most of the past. It's hard to imagine just how smokey everything was. You'd go out for a pint, sit on the top deck of a bus or even get the underground and you would end up stinking of ciggies. There's a whole load of worse stuff I can list that probably isn't appropriate for a magazine devoted to old videogames, but I'm sure you can imagine.

Iain – focus. Turn your ADHD off for the three minutes it takes you to write this stuff. You were mentioning something about 1982 being the best year. Can you explain?

Yes! I can. I was having a lovely weekend with some dear friends of mine. These don't happen often enough, as work and kids and life makes them hard to arrange.

It was a typical weekend of retro gaming (*Wip3out* and *Micro Machines* being the clear winners) and terrible movies. First up was *Hearts And Armour* watched on an actual VHS followed by *Hard Ticket To Hawaii*. Sadly, the latter was on YouTube, so all of the interesting 'bits' were cut out. We didn't realise until halfway through that both films star Ron Moss, a man whose muscular chin does all the heavy acting. 25% on Rotten Tomatoes too – perhaps a tad on the generous side.

We were trying to remember the year the Spectrum was released. A quick Google confirmed our suspicions – 1982. That on its own would make it a spectacular 12 months. One of the most iconic computers ever. It is my kids' last day at term soon, and I asked if they were taking their Spectrum and *Kerplunk* in for the kids to play with. It's a joke that went way over their heads. I don't need to explain it here, do I? Last day of term – you'd take toys in – one kid always brought his ZX…

I then looked at what else had happened that year, and the list is quite staggering. The Commodore 64, the first CD, the first artificial heart was inserted into a man's chest. That's not even the best of it – *Thriller, ET* and the launch of Channel 4. Do you remember when Channel 4 had its test signal where it would show a ten-minute teaser for the Channel? And we would sit there with the telly on all day waiting for it to come on?

OK. It wasn't all good. The Falklands and… I was about to list all the bad stuff that happened in 1982 and actually it's pretty grim reading. However, if you ignore ALL of the bad things that happened (and actually, maybe take *Thriller* off the list) it is still easily the best year of all time. Go on, write in and agree with me (or prove me wrong if you fancy a fight).

> "The Seventies, Eighties, Nineties, in fact all of the years, were much more rubbish than 2026"

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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26 MAY 2026

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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

The end game

Every generation of gaming is actually the birth of the next generation of retro gamers. That's the way it has always been. But, I fear, we might be seeing the end of retro gaming as we know it.

There's a lot of talk in the modern games industry about the disappearance of physical media. I'm not going to get into the specifics, because as I write this the backlash is such that by the time **Retro Gamer** lands in your lap, I wouldn't be surprised if certain corporate decisions had been rolled back. Accompanied by the usual damage limitation 'we listened to the fans' PR spiel.

Nevertheless, a world without discs is clearly the direction of travel. The momentum is there, and sooner or later… that's the world we'll be living in. No more discs, no more cartridges. Maybe no more consoles.

In the spirit of full disclosure, this doesn't bother me enormously. I'm neither for it nor against it. I don't love the idea of having to download stuff, and I understand the arguments, but admittedly… it has been a good while since I last powered up my PS5 – or even my Switch. If I play a modern game these days, it's generally through Microsoft's cloud gaming service, using an Xbox controller. It's just convenient; no installation, no real wait time.

But… I also get why so many people don't want this. There's the fear that you'll never really 'own' a game if physical media goes away entirely. That's real. But also, there's something about holding a physical product in your hands. The collector mentality is tied to nostalgia, and connecting – in a tangible way – to something that brought you joy. It isn't really possible to do that if you're really just licensing the things you buy, and they only exist in a sort of ephemeral format.

I don't have a huge collection of old hardware and games, but I do own a few bits and pieces that have sentimental value. I've got a ZX Spectrum, an *Astro Wars* machine, a couple of other old handhelds. Objects that mean something, and give me the warm and fuzzies.

What happens when future generations don't have anything physical they can hold onto like that; when nostalgia is no longer something you can interact with in the physical world?

And it's going to get worse than that: the way things are going, I can foresee a time where games are tailored entirely to the individual; AI experiences that adapt and change around the player in real-time. It may be that in the future no two games are ever the same. Games, as we know them, will cease to be.

In such a world, subsequent generations will have no concept of 'retro gaming' as we understand it; just their own, subjective, experiences, generated by their personalised AI agent, creating the games on the fly.

At once, it would be thrilling and also sort of depressing. Yes, imagine a version of *The Legend Of Zelda* with infinite possibility, with a world that never ends, with NPCs who react in ways that feel organic – because we've finally broken down the walls of a finite game world. But is that what we really want? No hardware. No permanent software. No shared, authored experiences.

No more retro gaming.

> "A world without discs is clearly the direction of travel"

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

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» [PlayStation 5] Alasdair works with companies like Clear River Games, so don't be surprised if some of that publisher's games are revealed.

» Alasdair Hibberd is the driving force behind Pixel Arcadia and hopes it will become a regular show that will champion new retro games.

Pixel Arcadia

Alasdair Hibberd on a new online game show that's dedicated to retro

Words by Darran Jones

Although E3 is no longer a thing, plenty of gaming shows, often online, have jumped in to plug the gap. From Sony's State Of Play to Nintendo's Direct and our very own Future Games Show, there's always a way to find out what new games are on the horizon. Unfortunately, many of these shows don't necessarily focus on retro games, or games with a distinctly retro aesthetic and that's where Pixel Arcadia plans to step in. Due to debut on 24 August, Pixel Arcadia promises to make sure that retro games are given their own stage to shine and Alasdair Hibberd, founder and CEO of Pixel Helix is here to explain how it's going to happen.

Why did you decide to set up Pixel Arcadia, Alasdair?
We started working on Pixel Arcadia in 2025 as a response to the changing landscape in games. We work with a number of publishers and independent developers operating in the retro space and more and more we felt the need for these titles to have their own stage, to not be overshadowed by AAA, and to reach an audience genuinely excited to celebrate retro.

What do you hope to offer over other online game shows?
For retro game fans, we are looking to produce a show that lives and breathes retro, and to establish cornerstone events for this audience specifically throughout the year. Retro titles have developed a habit of being awkwardly sandwiched in indie showcases, which in themselves are broad and unrefined. Instead we want to put retro on the centre stage.

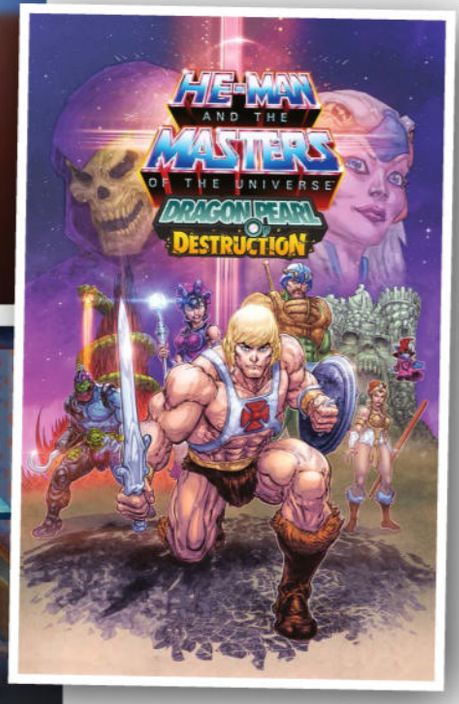
Why do you think so many retro games are getting released at the moment?
It's true to say that retro games are seeing a resurgence in 2026. We think this is a perfect storm of factors, including both gamers and publishers looking to break away from the current AAA model. Publishers are also finally realising the value in their legacy IP, and with that, finding the willpower required to bring many of these games out of complex licensing purgatory. It's

» [PC] Companies like Digital Eclipse do outstanding work, so a show like Pixel Arcadia feels like a fine place to show off its incoming games.

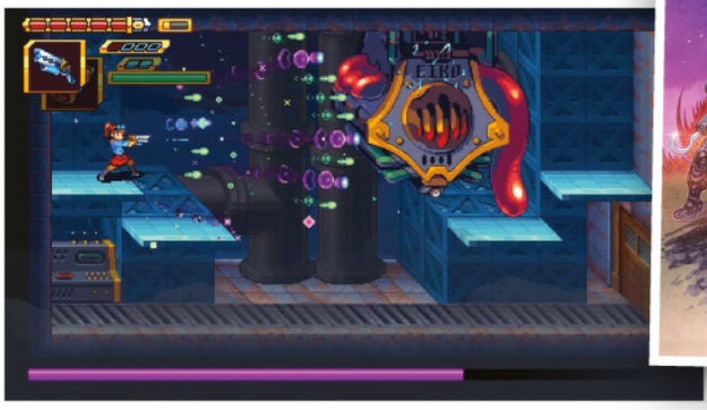
» [PC] If you're expecting big games like *Resident Evil: Veronica* to be announced at Pixel Arcadia you may be disappointed.

PIXEL ARCADIA
THE FUTURE OF RETRO

» Acclaim, MegaCat and Retroware are just a few of the publishers with games to show off at the show. You can get more information at pixel-arcadia.com



» We'd imagine Pixel Arcadia will be a great place to showcase incoming hardware like the NEOGEO AES+ going forward.



» [PC] Just being noticed is a huge issue for many indie titles. We'd have never known about *Clockwork Ambrosia* if its creator hadn't contacted us.

» Plenty of Limited Run releases are making it to the UK now. Could Pixel Arcadia be a place to highlight incoming releases? We think so.

a really exciting time to be a retro gamer. We're going to see IPs return in the next few years that we thought were lost forever.

What's the biggest issue that indie/retro-style games face at the moment and how will Pixel Arcadia help them?
The biggest issue retro games face right now is discovery. The media landscape has evolved so rapidly over the past three years, many incredible outlets have been lost, and on top-of-that, the typical retro gamer is not engaged as strongly across short-form video platforms where many contemporary titles find their audience. We're teaming up with incredible partners to ensure that Pixel Arcadia builds visibility with the core audience as well as reaching out to a new generation of gamers seeking offline experiences.

How long will Pixel Arcadia be running for and how many new games are you hoping to announce at the show?
We're aiming to deliver a 90-minute show of the greatest new retro releases from start to finish, and we have more than 50 titles being shown as part of the event.

What can you tell us about the type of games that will be shown?
We have an incredible line-up in store, from long established and legendary publishers in the retro space through to independent developers. You'll see the return of prestigious titles you'd all but given up hope on, new titles developed for your favourite retro hardware, new entries in classic IP and standout retro-inspired titles coming to modern platforms. It's safe to say we were overwhelmed with the response for this debut event and the competition is already tough.

What sort of sponsors have you attracted so far?
We're working with a fantastic group of sponsors and partners to support the event, including not only retro publishers and hardware manufacturers, but storefronts and media partners too. We had a lot of positive feedback from the industry when we started talking about Pixel Arcadia. People shared in our vision quickly and they wanted to be a part of it.

> "We're aiming to deliver a 90-minute show of the greatest new retro releases from start to finish"
>
> **ALASDAIR HIBBERD**

Is the aim to have Pixel Arcadia as a yearly event or will it be more frequent?
We'd love to make Pixel Arcadia a more frequent event, to unite the retro community in a way that supports this space throughout the year. Right now though, we are focussed on making the showcase on 24 August the very best it can be. ✱

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

MARCH 1980 – Sales of the Atari 2600 console surge as two mega-hit games arrive, while another new micro hits the market. In the arcades, the Space Invaders craze shows little sign of abating…

THE MONTH'S HIGHLIGHTS

IN THE WORLD

News In Brief

JR Ewing is shot in US TV soap *Dallas*, leading to a worldwide "Who shot JR?" pop culture phenomenon. The British Olympic Committee votes to not boycott the summer Olympic Games held in Moscow. NASA's Voyager 1 probe confirms the existence of Saturn's moon Janus.

IN THE CHARTS

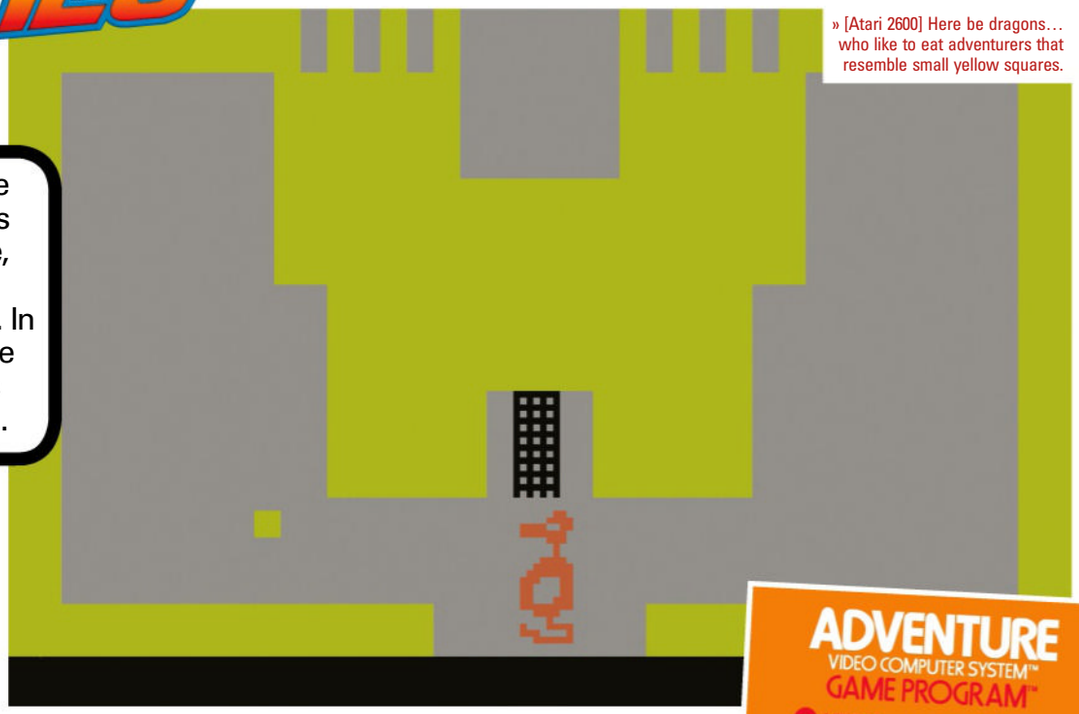
Disco Inferno

The top-selling UK single this month is *Together We Are Beautiful* from American singer Fern Kinney. Just behind it in second place is The Jam with the double A-side of *Going Underground* and *Dreams Of Children*. Blondie, Marti Webb and Liquid Gold round out the top five.

IN THE CINEMA

Jerk Vs Zombies

US comedies continue to rule the UK box office, with *The Jerk* starring Steve Martin taking over from *Meatballs* at the top spot. There's also a belated UK cinema release for George Romero's *Dawn Of The Dead*. Great news – except the BBFC has censored four minutes of gore.



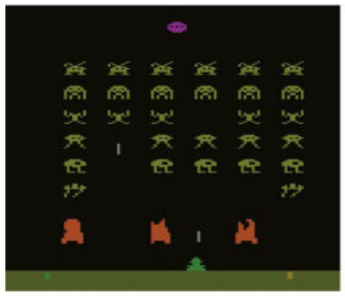
» [Atari 2600] Here be dragons… who like to eat adventurers that resemble small yellow squares.

MARCH 1980

Atari ventures out and Acorn splits the Atom

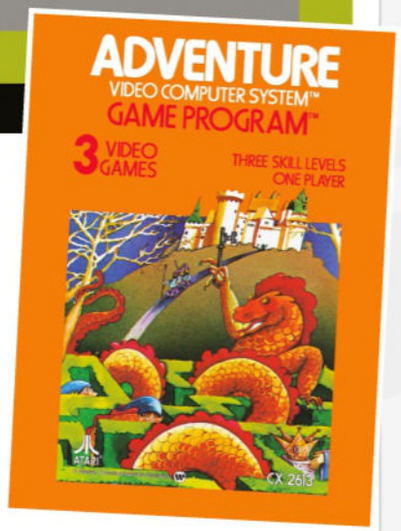
At the beginning of the year, Atari announced that it was doubling down on software support for its Atari 2600 console. New releases arrive regularly and March sees two of the system's biggest hits land during the same month.

The first is *Adventure*, Warren Robinett's graphical reimagining of the old mainframe standard *Colossal Cave Adventure*. The game is surprisingly intricate and ambitious for a 2600 title and it quickly becomes one of the system's biggest successes, selling more than a million copies. It later gains fame for popularising the concept of videogame Easter eggs (Robinett famously defied Atari and sneaked his name into the game). *Adventure* flies the flag for more involved console games, but simple space shooters are still in vogue and its popularity is eclipsed by this month's other 2600 release.



» [Atari 2600] Atari's home version of *Space Invaders* features more than 100 variations, including zigzagging enemy fire, moving shields and even invisible invaders.

The Atari console version of Taito's mega hit *Space Invaders* is the first instance of a coin-op being licensed for home systems. It is also the first example of a system seller, a console 'killer app'. Atari will sell 1.25 million copies of *Space Invaders* before the year is out and its success – along with that of *Adventure* – are primarily responsible for doubling the installed user base of 2600s to more than 2 million in 1980. The version itself is solid and actually expands on the original by offering 112 (one hundred and twelve!) gameplay variations.



Want to take on invisible invaders while cowering under moving shields? Fill your boots.

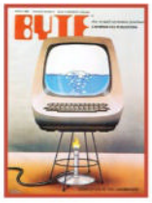
The year has already seen the introduction of two new computers aimed at the hobbyist market: the Sinclair ZX80 and the ECEA Video Genie. Acorn follows suit this month with the Atom, a 6502 machine that retails for around £200 in its expanded form. At this price it's aimed at more serious users, although a small library of games from the likes of Quicksilva, Bug-Byte and Acornsoft will become available for it. Perhaps the computer's biggest claim to fame is that teenagers David Braben and Ian Bell will begin writing games for the machine before teaming up to create *Elite* for the Atom's successor, the Proton (aka the BBC Micro).

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF MARCH 1980

ZX80 Reaction Is In

TPCW magazine reacts to the surprise arrival of the Sinclair ZX80. "Clive Sinclair has done it at last… produce a personal micro with keyboard, TV interface and BASIC for under £80 in kit form, and I for one don't know how," writes Guy Kewney. "It's only apparent drawback is the fact that it uses a touch sensitive keyboard… no doubt to keep costs down."

HP Enters The Market



Byte reviews the HP-85, the first personal computer from Hewlett-Packard. The all-in-one portable computer is aimed at scientific users and costs a cool $3,250 – enough to buy 18 ZX80s. "We were impressed with the performance of the HP-85," summarises Christopher Morgan. "The graphics alone make this an attractive alternative to existing small systems."

Compute: The Sequel

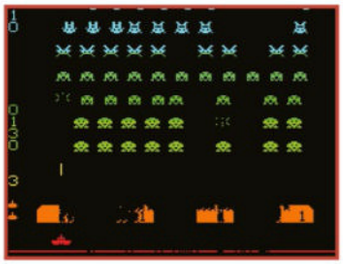
It only launched in late-1979, but *Compute* magazine is already preparing a spin-off. "Our growth has been tremendous, and we're seeing pressure mounting for issue space," writes editor Robert Lock. "Our resolution? *Compute II*." The 'sequel' will focus on single-board computers, while the main magazine will continue with Commodore, Atari, Apple et al.

Atari Soccer Kicks Off

The latest edition of Atari's *Coin Connection* promo mag announces that *Atari Football* is to kick off in the US (under the name *Atari Soccer*, of course). "*Atari Soccer* has been thoroughly tested and refined in European markets," says Atari's Frank Ballouz. "We feel the game is now ready for introduction in the US [to] continue the winning tradition."

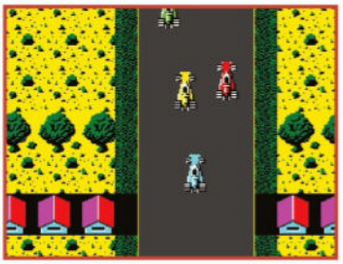
Star Raiding

If the Atari 2600 has a killer app in *Space Invaders*, the Atari 8-bit computer has its own in *Space Raiders*, Doug Neubauer's space combat simulator. The game will become hugely influential, triggering a wave of first-person space games that combine action and strategy.



Midway Invaders

Not to be confused with Taito's own *Space Invaders Part II*, *Space Invaders II* is a quasi-official sequel released this month by the game's US licensee Midway. It is designed as a head-to-head game for cocktail tables, with players battling against the invaders – and each other.



More Monaco

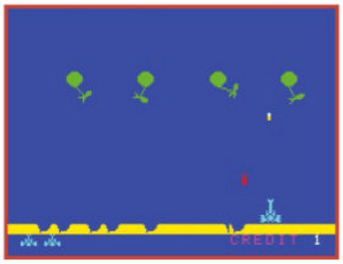
Sega releases *Pro Monaco GP*, an updated version of its excellent 1979 arcade racer *Monaco GP*. The new version is faster and more difficult, and now features battery back-up for saving high scores. It's hard to believe that the hardware is TTL-based, running without a CPU.

Sega's Samurai

Sega's second coin-op release of the month is *Samurai*, a Japanese exclusive where you're besieged by multiple enemies in trap-filled arenas. The presence of a master samurai 'boss' is a novel touch. The game seems to have been inspired by the *Lone Wolf And Cub* series.

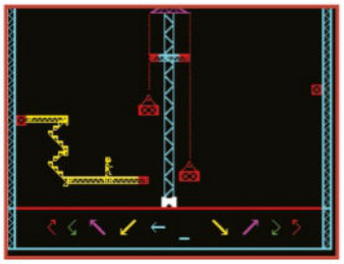
Ryn's A Win

It's all change at the top of the TRS-80 sales chart as Scott Adams' *Voodoo Castle* is replaced by *Datestones Of Ryn* from Automated Simulations. In this rudimentary RPG players take control of one Brian Hammerhand – an early contender for the best questrist name ever.



Pop The Balloons

Taito's at it again, trying to re-conjure the magic of *Space Invaders* with yet another shooter. In *Balloon Bomber* you target bomb-laden balloons. If a bomb hits the ground it produces a crater which reduces the manoeuvrability of your tank. There's not much else to report.



Show Some Steel

It seems Taito wasn't completely fixated on space shooters. A case in point is *Steel Worker*, a clever strategy game where you place platforms and stairs to help an ever-advancing, zombie-like employee cross a deadly building site. Shades of *Super Pipeline* are on show.

It's A Rip Off?

Despite its title, *Rip Off* from Cinematronics is a novel coin-op concept. Developed by Tim Skelly, this arcade vector shooter sees you protecting precious fuel canisters from wicked alien pirates. It was one of the first shooter games to introduce co-operative play.

Siege

WE WILL ROCK YOU

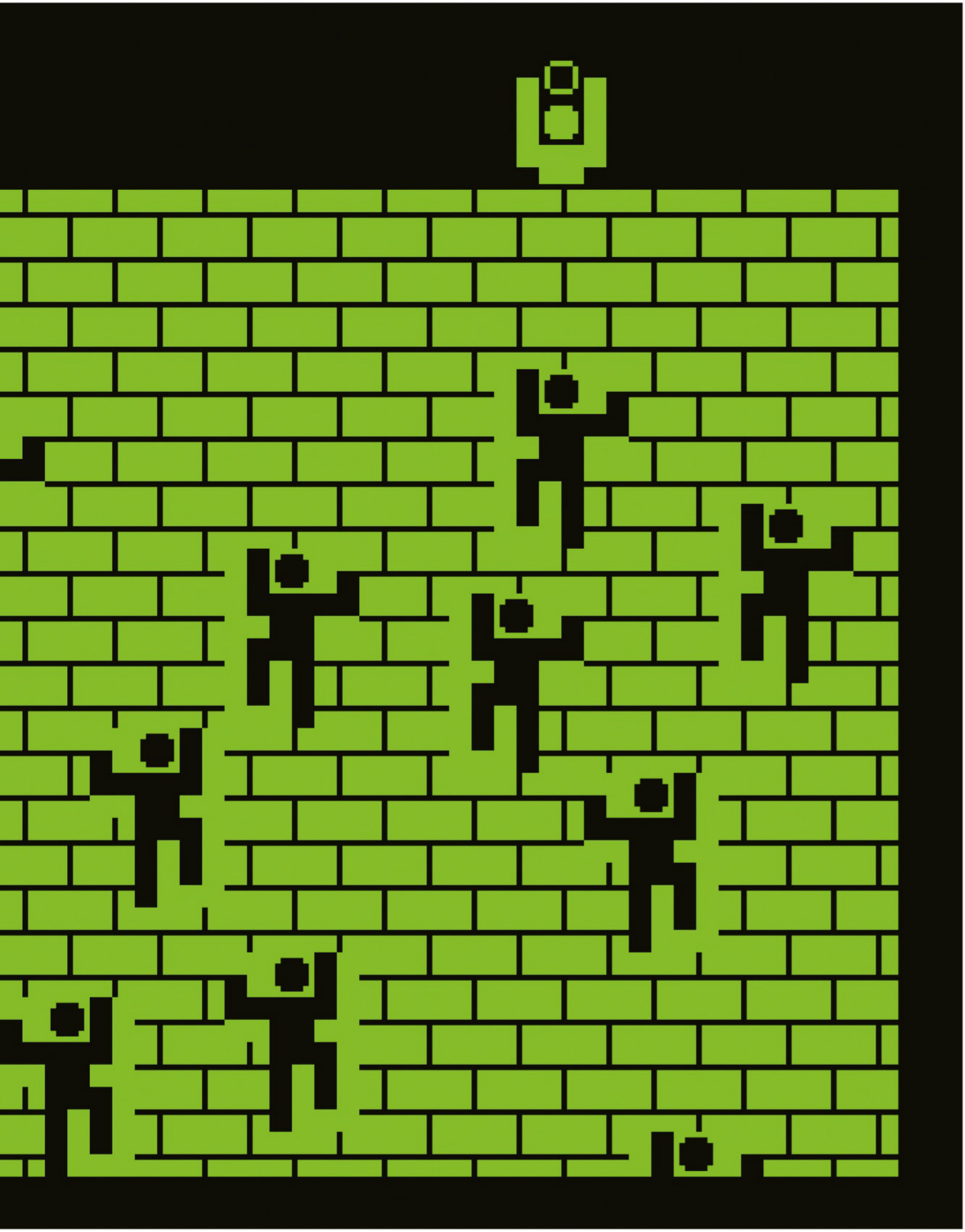
» COMMODORE PET » 1983
» MIKE SINGLETON / POSTERN

I'm always asking programmers how they got into computers and what the first game they ever played was. Everyone remembers their first game, don't they? Well except me it seems. I've claimed before that it was *Muncher*, a *Pac-man* clone for the ZX Spectrum. That was certainly the first game I owned, but a recent chat with my brother triggered a lost memory about an earlier game. This game.

Our father managed a small engineering firm. Sometimes when he was working late, which was often, he'd bring my brother and I along and we'd kill the time in his workshop, messing around with the metal lathes and angle grinders, as carefree Eighties kids did. We also hung around in his office where there was an imposing Commodore PET that hogged half his desk. Presumably this was there for doing the company accounts or something equally boring, but one evening my brother discovered some PET games in a drawer. One of them was *Siege*.

It's a very simple game, where you move a character along the top of a castle wall, dropping rocks on the heads of enemy soldiers who are clambering up towards you. As a wide-eyed seven year old I found this thrilling – and funny, especially the 'YAH!' that appears above your character's head every time they drop a rock on an enemy's noodle. It obviously made such a lasting impression that I forget all about it for 40-odd years.

A quick web search revealed the name of the game and it all came flooding back – along with the revelation that it was an early effort by Mike Singleton, who would go on to create one of my favourite-ever games, *The Lords Of Midnight*, just one year later. To go from *Siege*, with its simple concept and PETSCII graphics, to an epic strategy game featuring almost 4,000 individual locations in the space of a few months, is nothing short of incredible. It now appears I've been a fan of Mike's work for even longer than I thought.



40 years of
Code Masters

CODEMASTERS WAS LAUNCHED AS 'ANOTHER' BUDGET-GAME PUBLISHER IN 1986, BUT THE FIRM WOULD SOON ESTABLISH ITSELF AS A UK DEVELOPER OF DISTINCTION, EXPANDING INTO THE CONSOLE MARKET AND STILL GOING STRONG TODAY, FOUR DECADES ON. JOIN US AS WE REMEMBER THE ERAS THAT DEFINED THE STUDIO

WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES AND MARTYN CARROLL

» Brothers Richard (left) and David (right) Darling were the public face of Codemasters, with their 'whiz-kid' personas emphasised by the firm's PR activity.

» [C64] The fledgling company took flight with the release of the chart-topping *BMX Simulator*.

» [ZX Spectrum] The Darlings were initially unconvinced by Dizzy, but the character quickly became a fan favourite and mascot for Codemasters.

» [Amstrad CPC] Developed by Andrew and Philip Oliver, CPC platformer *Super Robin Hood* was an early bull's-eye for Codemasters.

Brothers Richard and David Darling were still young men, aged 19 and 20 respectively, when they established Codemasters, with the help of their father Jim, in October 1986. Yet despite their youth, the brothers already had years of industry experience under their belts. They established Galactic Software while still at school and developed a range of games, initially for the Commodore VIC-20. They soon hooked up with budget game pioneers Mastertronic, where they found rapid and regular success with titles like *BMX Racers*, *Chiller* and *The Last V8*.

For Mastertronic, the pair would demonstrate the industry acumen they would take forward in their careers. They weren't just writing new software, they were also helping to source it from elsewhere for the growing publisher. Their efforts were vital in supporting the firm's "pile 'em high, sell 'em cheap" budget-game strategy that was disrupting the market. By the time they left school they had earned around £200,000 from their endeavours and held a significant share in Mastertronic. Eyeing the opportunity to become even more successful by going it alone, they sold their Mastertronic share and used the proceeds to found Codemasters.

Although Mastertronic games were cheap, they weren't always cheerful (the Darlings themselves produced a few stinkers for the label). For Codemasters, the plan was to keep the price low, but raise the quality level – an approach summed up in an early advertising line, "The best games at the best price." To help with this aim, the pair used the commercial knowledge they'd gleaned from their time with Mastertronic, where the key takeaway was that games based on everyday pursuits – namely their biking games – struck as chord with their target market. This led to Richard writing Codemasters' first game, *BMX Simulator*, which became a sales smash and was followed by a seemingly never-ending series of *Simulator* titles. These releases were bolstered by the efforts of another pair of talented siblings, the Oliver twins, who created the hit *Dizzy* series.

Codemasters could not be accused of resting on its laurels. It supported the 8-bit market longer than most – with £1.99 games becoming £2.99 and eventually £3.99 – but it was always eyeing new markets and opportunities. It soon targeted the 16-bit computer market, the full-price market and, in 1990, the console market with the introduction of the Game Genie cheat device for the NES. The firm initially avoided licences, but it would experience huge success with games based on Galoob's *Micro Machines* toy line. It later collaborated with cricketer Brian Lara, tennis player Pete Sampras and rally driver Colin McRae to create a series of enduring sports titles. Racing games soon became the studio's speciality, thanks to titles like the *TOCA*, *Dirt*, *Grid* and the official *Formula 1* games. Its success in this field attracted attention from industry colossi and Codemasters was eventually acquired by Electronic Arts in 2021.

Codemasters was not swallowed up by EA, and its name and identity have been retained, albeit with a singular focus on *F1* games these days. But as you'll discover over the following pages, the company has been responsible for dozens of 'absolutely brilliant' games – in multiple genres, across countless platforms – during its storied 40-year history.

» [PlayStation] The *Micro Machines* games were tons of fun, especially in multiplayer, typified by *V3* on Sony's PlayStation.

» [PlayStation] *Colin McRae Rally* invited players to get behind the wheel of the driver's famous Subaru Impreza.

THE SIMULATOR GAMES

BMX SIMULATOR

1986 · RICHARD DARLING

When deciding on a game to kickstart their new company, Richard and David Darling took inspiration from one of their past games: *BMX Racers*, the best-selling, top-down budget game they had developed for Mastertronic.

Richard then got down to work, drawing on his knowledge of physics and considering how gravity and friction could affect the riders across each of the game's seven, single-screen courses. The brothers believed this made the game sufficiently realistic, allowing it to earn the word 'simulator' in the title.

With berms, hay bales and jumps to negotiate as well as extra bursts of speed when players timed the bends just right, the resulting game was certainly a challenge – more so given it was also a race against a timer. It sold 345,423 copies and a sequel, *Professional BMX Simulator*, followed two years later.

GRAND PRIX SIMULATOR

1987 · THE OLIVER TWINS

Having noticed how well simulators were selling (David Darling once said they sold ten times better than fantasy games, primarily because players knew what they were getting), Codemasters commissioned the Oliver twins to build on the popularity of *BMX Simulator* and develop another top-down racer, this time involving Formula 1 cars.

Created over two months on the Amstrad CPC, *Grand Prix Simulator* had tiny, rectangular vehicles (produced using the Olivers' own tool, Panda Sprites), skidding and sliding, as players sought to complete three laps against a time limit around 14 obstacle-strewn tracks. The title was ported to other 8-bit home computers where it was endorsed by Johnny Dumfries, a backmarker who made his F1 World Championship debut the previous year but didn't drive another season. Still, it became Codemasters' first motor-racing game and that made it rather significant.

SUPER TANK SIMULATOR

1989 · OPTIMUS SOFTWARE LTD

In 1988, Codemasters experimented with a Codemasters Plus range offering games such as *Jet Bike Simulator* and *Pro BMX Simulator* for a few pounds more than a budget title. The experiment didn't work out, however, so the simulators returned to budget prices and continued to be pumped out at a rate of knots. *Super Tank Simulator* went in all guns blazing, offering eight overhead-viewed battle zones and polished play which, at times, had echoes of Hewson's *Marauder*.

PRO BOXING SIMULATOR

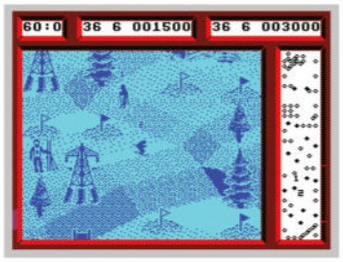
1989 · SUPERIOR SOFTWARE

As if to prove the weight that Codemasters attached to its simulator series, it rereleased Superior Software's funny and feisty *By Fair Means... Or Foul* under the name *Pro Boxing Simulator*. In the process, this ageing 8-bit game was promoted as a new release and that didn't go down too well with gamers, prompting the Codies to offer refunds and reprint the cassette inlay. The game was later converted by Codemasters to the Atari ST and Amiga.

PUB TRIVIA SIMULATOR

1989 · PETER WILLIAMSON

Having previously published a game based on one pub favourite (the feature-packed *Fruit Machine Simulator*), Codemasters went on to release a riff on popular arcade quiz machines. Players could pick one of the colourful characters and, if they wished, compete against friends to try to win virtual cash by answering a series of multiple-choice questions spread across various categories. There were 2,000 questions to test players' sport, music and showbiz knowledge.



PROFESSIONAL SKI SIMULATOR

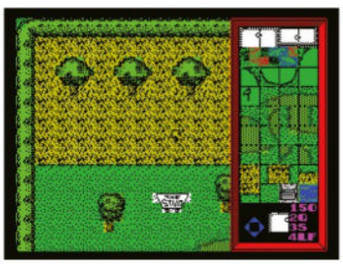
1987 · THE OLIVER TWINS

Codemasters' many young and enthusiastic developers enjoyed a healthy social life and, given Richard and David Darling were teenagers when they set up the company, they often spent time outside of work with their staff and external contractors. As such, the idea for *Professional Ski Simulator* came after the Olivers went on a skiing holiday with the Darlings. The game's scrolling isometric 3D ski-runs were inspired by *Marble Madness* and, while the controls were fiddly and time limits tight, it was successful enough to be converted to the 16-bits as *Advanced Ski Simulator*.

SAS COMBAT SIMULATOR

1989 · OPTIMUS SOFTWARE

Without being a member of the SAS, it's hard to judge the faithfulness of this sim but, as a combat arcade game inspired by titles such as *Ikari Warriors*, *Rambo*, *Commando* and Konami's *Green Beret*, it certainly packed a punch. Produced using a cross-platform development kit created by PDS, the game scrolled vertically and horizontally and it had a side-scrolling combat section. The box carried a gushing quote by David Darling – one of many to adorn Codemasters' releases.



PRO GOLF SIMULATOR

1989 · GRANT WORSFOLD

In *Pro Golf Simulator*, up to four players could enjoy an 18-hole competition, choosing from a selection of clubs while navigating bunkers, lakes, trees and various other hazards. If you were struggling with a certain hole it was possible to practice on it, and you could also hone your putting skills on the green. There were some lovely animations too. As a nice touch, there was also a lot of fun to be had in the editor where gamer's could create, save and play their own courses.

A Q&A WITH

DAVID DARLING

DAVID WAS THE COFOUNDER OF CODEMASTERS ALONG WITH HIS BROTHER, RICHARD, IN 1986

Why did you decide to initially concentrate on producing budget-price games, David?
We'd previously worked at Mastertronic, where we'd seen just how successful that approach could be. Our goal was to make high-quality games that were affordable so they could reach as many people as possible.

What was your philosophy for the company?
We wanted to focus on creating experiences that were genuinely fun to play. We started out as arcade gamers in Canada, and because we loved playing those games ourselves, our goal was simply to make the best games we could.

What was the thinking behind the *Simulator* titles?
We wanted to make games about real life activities, whether that was football, rugby or Grand Prix racing. We tried to make them as realistic as we could because, back then, most games were based on fictional stories, something like 'Captain X Goes To Mars'. We realised there was a real interest in games based on things people actually did, whether it was skateboarding, skiing or whatever else was popular at the time.

How did you decide upon a theme for a *Simulator* game?
Basically, we chose a popular theme, whether it was jet skiing or skateboarding or skiing or football or tennis, and then we tried to make the game around that. We tried to pick the most popular themes while bearing in mind how much competition there already was in the marketplace, and whether it was possible to beat the competition.

And which of the *Simulator* games deserved to be labelled 'Absolutely Brilliant'?
BMX Simulator. It was incredibly competitive, and my brother even made a simultaneous four-player version, with two people using the Commodore 64 keyboard and two playing with joysticks. It was just a lot of fun and took a fair bit of skill to master. The Oliver twins' *Grand Prix Simulator* was another standout, and Ted Carron's *International Rugby Simulator* received fantastic reviews, with many calling it one of the best rugby games around. I also thought *ATV Simulator*, which Tim Miller worked on, turned out really well. Looking back, we had a strong run.

THE OLIVER TWINS GAMES

SUPER ROBIN HOOD

1986 · THE OLIVER TWINS

The Oliver twins created a huge number of games for Codemasters, so much so, their vast contribution played a major role in earning them recognition from Guinness World Records as the most prolific 8-bit videogame developers. This game, however, is where it all began: *Super Robin Hood*, a title snapped up by the Darlings based on a proposal handwritten on a single A4 piece of paper. It earned Philip and Andrew Oliver in excess of £10,000.

Given the quality of this platform game which included voice synthesis courtesy of their mum ("Help me, Robin"), it's surprising that it took just a month to develop, albeit with the brothers working a total of 23 hours each day, taking it in turns to use their sole Amstrad CPC. With solid gameplay and delightful design, it's since become a cult favourite.

DIZZY: THE ULTIMATE CARTOON ADVENTURE

1987 · THE OLIVER TWINS

It would be so easy to fill a spread about The Oliver twins by simply listing all of their 'eggs-ellent' *Dizzy* games. Dizzy was, after all, the character that was intrinsically linked with the pair and he effectively became Codemaster's unofficial mascot – or, at the very least, the character that immediately sprung to mind when thinking about the publisher.

Primarily targeted at eight to 12 year olds, the graphic adventure series tapped into the Olivers' love of kids' cartoons yet, despite its success, David Darling wasn't keen on the original pitch. He believed the Codies would be better served if the Olivers developed more simulator titles, but it soon transpired that players loved guiding the anthropomorphic egg across a fantasy world, picking up objects and using them to solve puzzles.

Treasure Island Dizzy followed (frustratingly, offering one life) but *Fantasy World Dizzy*, the series' third game which introduced the Yolkfolk, was an undoubted highlight.

GHOST HUNTERS

1987 · THE OLIVER TWINS

Inspired by *Ghostbusters* and *Scooby Doo, Ghost Hunters* was the Olivers' second game for the Codies and, to save time, it used the same underlying engine as *Super Robin Hood*. As well as navigating platforms across 21 rooms, players would control a gun's cross-hair to shoot at ghouls and demons. This also opened up the possibility of a fun co-op experience. It's certainly a little clunky at times, but it still manages to entertain today.

3D STARFIGHTER

1987 · THE OLIVER TWINS

The Olivers were becoming a draw in their own right and the Codies wanted to capitalise on the duo's popularity. So, for the box of space shooter *3D Starfighter* – inspired by the 1979 vector arcade game *Tail Gunner* and Sega's *Space Harrier* – the company drew strong attention to the Olivers' previous hits. The game only took a couple of weeks to write and it felt a tad rushed, leading *Popular Computer Weekly* to ponder if they were spreading themselves too thinly.

THE RACE AGAINST TIME

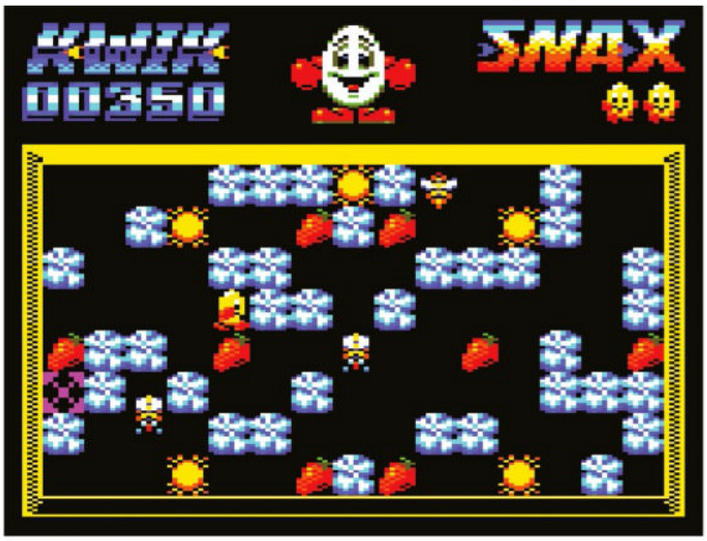
1989 · THE OLIVER TWINS

Created as a Codemasters Plus title, *The Race Against Time* was a flip-screen, *Dizzy*-esque arcade adventure starring Omer Khalifa, a Sudanese middle-distance runner. Boasting music by Peter Gabriel, the game was created to raise money for Sport Aid '88, a charity event created by Bob Geldof to raise money for famine relief in Africa. Sadly, it didn't sell well.

OPERATION GUNSHIP

1989 · THE OLIVER TWINS

By 1989, it was clear that Codemasters had hit upon a winning formula. When reviewing *Operation Gunship*, *Amstrad Action* said it was "classic Codemasters: not much plot, simple gameplay and very engrossing" – mixed praise, if ever we've heard it. Still, this eight-way scroller was a satisfying blast-'em-up. It was inspired by both *Choplifter* on the Apple IIe and the gunship scene in the movie *Rambo: First Blood Part II*.



KWIK SNAX

1989 · THE OLIVER TWINS

Dizzy starred in many spin-off arcade games, with *Kwik Snax* among the best of them. The Olivers designed this game for the Spectrum and Amstrad, having players collect fruit and push blocks to trap or squash enemies. But they had become so busy and influential, they had little choice but to hand programming duties to Lyndon Sharp and graphics to Chris Graham. A different version entirely was created for the Commodore 64.

MAGICLAND DIZZY

1990 · THE OLIVER TWINS/BIG RED SOFTWARE

The Olivers' pressing need to manage their time more effectively became even more important when they began to work on console games which took longer to develop. So while they toiled on *The Fantastic Adventures Of Dizzy*, a superb graphic adventure interspersed with minigames created for the NES, they passed future home-computer *Dizzy* games to Big Red Software, starting with *Magicland Dizzy*, the fourth entry. For this, the Olivers drew up a design with Neal Vincent but Big Red did the rest. The series would prove to be in very safe hands.

A Q&A WITH

PHILIP OLIVER

PHILIP AND ANDREW OLIVER PRODUCED MANY SIMULATORS FOR CODEMASTERS AND MANY MORE GAMES BESIDES

What attracted you to work with Codemasters?
Richard and David Darling were not distant, traditional publishers in suits. They were young, ambitious game developers and they understood what it took to write a game. Most publishers could talk about sales, boxes and schedules but the Darlings, who had come out of making games for Mastertronic, understood the graft behind the code.

Why do you think the *Dizzy* series connected so strongly with players?
Dizzy worked because he was simple, readable and strangely charming. On the 8-bits you had very little memory, very few pixels and very little time to explain anything. An egg with boxing gloves should probably not have worked, but it gave players an instantly recognisable character. You could see him, understand him and remember him.

It helped that the games were not just about reflexes. They were little worlds to explore. They mixed arcade movement with adventure puzzles, fairy-tale settings and a sense of humour. Players could wander around, try things, get stuck, come back later and talk to friends about solutions. That gave the games a life beyond the screen.

When did you realise Codemasters had grown?
At first Codemasters felt like a small, family run operation. When we delivered *Super Robin Hood*, their Banbury office was a small industrial unit, with David and Richard sharing a room, Jim Darling handling sales and distribution, and Abigail, their sister, on reception. It felt energetic and serious, but still very compact.

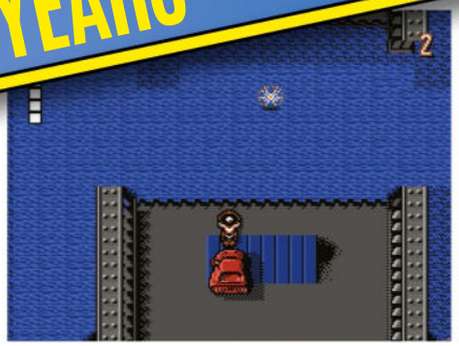
Then Codemasters expanded, moved to the Southam farmhouse and built a proper publishing machine around budget games. By the late-Eighties it was obvious that they were not just another small publisher and, at one point in 1989, Codemasters had around a quarter of the UK market.

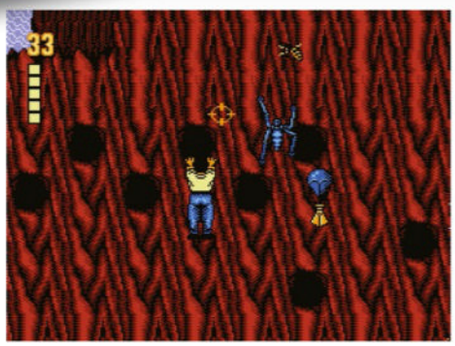
Were you given free rein to create whatever you wanted for the Codies?
Yes, in the sense that the ideas were ours and the pressure to deliver them quickly came from us, not from Codemasters telling us what to make. We decided what we thought would work, wrote the games, finished them and delivered them. Because we were not spending weeks pitching, justifying or waiting for approval, we could move incredibly quickly.

Was it easy to move from the 8-bits to 16-bits and from home computers to early consoles?
Codemasters found some great developers on the Atari ST and Amiga, and a lot of our earlier 8-bit games were converted to those machines. They also produced plenty of new games for those platforms but the cost of development increased considerably, and profitability went down. That increased the risk for everyone.

Andrew and I initially shied away from making the leap to 16-bit home computers because we had mastered 8-bit development. The obvious opportunity for us was the enormous American market dominated by the 8-bit NES. For Codemasters, moving into consoles was not simply a case of learning a more powerful machine. It meant cartridge production, high inventory costs and serious legal issues.

THE EARLY CONSOLE YEARS





THE ULTIMATE STUNTMAN

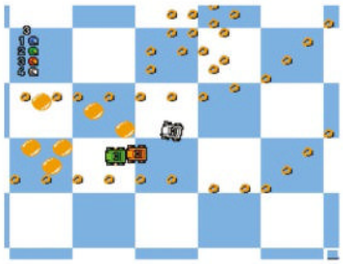
1990 · CODEMASTERS

Around 1990, Codemasters noticed a decline in the 8-bit home-computer market. To expand its reach, it had been releasing games for the 16-bit Atari ST and Amiga, but the company's focus increasingly switched to consoles, notably the NES and Sega's Mega Drive.

Developing games for Nintendo was a challenge, however. Codemasters had tried but failed to gain a licence from the Japanese giant so it decided to go it alone, producing titles that bypassed the NES' lock-out chip. One of the games to benefit was *The Ultimate Stuntman*, published in the US by the Canadian company Camerica.

The colourful single-player action game offered players three main levels as well as many sub-levels and it was not only tense but varied. Players could drive, solve puzzles, shoot, climb, fly and make their way across platforms. They'd also be able to listen to Gavin Raeburn's highly-praised soundtrack which had upbeat tunes featuring waves created on a Casio CZ-101 keyboard.

Creating carts with a bypass chip included proved expensive, so Richard Darling devised the Aladdin Deck Enhancer in 1992 which placed the bypass chip, graphics chip and memory control chip in a unit of its own. Players could then connect cheap compact carts containing just the game ROM. Codemasters was certainly innovative.



MICRO MACHINES

1991 · CODEMASTERS

This hit game effectively built on Codemasters' penchant for top-down racers. A tie-in with toy manufacturer Galoob, it was first developed for the NES and saw players racing tiny vehicles around breakfast tables, school desks and treehouses, avoiding obstacles such as cereal boxes and pencil sharpeners. Codemasters had to reverse engineer the NES to aid development but this classic drove to the top of the charts.

BIG NOSE THE CAVEMAN

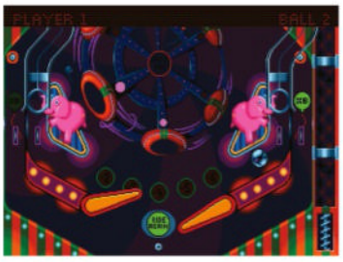
1991 · OPTIMUS SOFTWARE

Codemasters relied on Camerica to release games for the NES while it continued to publish games for home computers. It also continued to work with developers such as Optimus Software which produced this cutesy, cartoon-like platformer. As players romped through prehistory in pursuit of a pterodactyl, they'd collect bones and dispatch various prehistoric lifeforms that got in the way.

DIZZY THE ADVENTURER

1992 · THE OLIVER TWINS

This enhanced version of *Dizzy: Prince Of The Yolkfolk* was the little egg's second NES outing following *The Fantastic Adventures Of Dizzy* in 1991. Bundled with the Aladdin Deck Enhancer, it was more polished than the original and Camerica, which published the game, had great ambition with plans to license the character for plush toys, action figures and an animated series.



PSYCHO PINBALL

1994 · CODEMASTERS

***Psycho Pinball* was one of a number of Codemasters games released for the Mega Drive.** The Codies had originally developed unlicensed titles but, following a legal wrangle, Sega made it an officially licensed third-party publisher and allowed it to produce its own carts. This game offered players multiple tables to enjoy and gave them the chance to compete in a series of fun minigames, including a mad dash across the roof of a fast-moving train.

PETE SAMPRAS TENNIS

1994 · ZEPPELIN GAMES

Codemasters continued to publish sports-related titles for the consoles, releasing *Pete Sampras Tennis* for Sega's Mega Drive and Game Gear. This was the first game to use Codemasters' innovative J-Cart for the Mega Drive which was a special cartridge that added two extra gamepad ports, allowing four players to enjoy the game simultaneously. Only a handful of games were published on such a cart, including a trio of *Micro Machines* releases and *Super Skidmarks*. One, *Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament*, catered for up to eight players.

CJ: ELEPHANT FUGITIVE

1994 · BIG RED SOFTWARE

One of the hallmarks of Codemasters for the best part of ten years was its love of cute characters. CJ was among them, having starred in *CJ's Elephant Antics* on the Commodore 64 and Mega Drive before being widely ported. For the Game Gear, a handheld Codemasters had supported with a small number of games, *CJ's Elephant Antics* was enhanced and renamed. Alas, this side-scrolling platformer would be CJ's last outing because Codemasters wanted to pursue new products.

MICRO MACHINES V3

1997 · CODEMASTERS

Sony invited Codemasters to become a licensed developer for the PlayStation – an offer which the Darlings couldn't refuse. The company was excited to get to grips with the console's 3D capabilities and it took the opportunity to move *Micro Machines* into the third dimension, managing to perfectly capture the feel of the 2D game with its tight controls and cool courses while introducing hidden collectibles and amazing new weapons, among them a huge mallet. ▶

A Q&A WITH

ANDREW GRAHAM

ANDREW WROTE MICRO MACHINES FOR THE NES AND WORKED ON THE GAME GENIE CHEAT PERIPHERAL

How difficult was it to create *Micro Machines* on the NES?
We had a brief document that someone had put together [at Codemasters] from reverse engineering the hardware but I don't remember it being especially hard to work out how to get the NES to do what we wanted. I already had loads of experience coding for the C64 and there were actually quite a few similarities between the two (character-based graphics, hardware sprites, coding in 6502). I think the main challenge was that the NES had separate video RAM that wasn't directly addressable by the CPU, so everything needed to be updated indirectly through a couple of registers.

Did the fact the game was on a console shape how you approached its development?
When I started coding on the NES, it was the first time I had used a cross compiler. This is when you write and compile the code on one machine (for example, a PC), then send it down a wire to the target machine (for example, the NES). Ted Carron at Codemasters built a hardware system that connected to the cross compiler, and also plugged into the NES. We could download our binary code to this box of electronics, and it looked to the NES as if it was a cartridge so the game would run.

You worked on the Game Genie. Was it difficult to create?
I was just asked to make a fun user interface for it and it only took a couple of weeks or so. It all had to fit into 4K and I had to use a very simple chunky character set. There were only 16 characters, and they were defined using actual logic gates rather than being stored in ROM. Doing it that way saved a bit of money on the hardware components but it meant that the graphics had to look really chunky.

Codemasters made many games for the early consoles but some other publishers/developers struggled with the next step: 32-bit consoles. How did Codemasters manage to make that leap so successfully?
When I started at Codemasters, the developers were mainly people who had progressed from being teenage bedroom programmers. We learned what we needed from the machine manuals, and worked out how to do stuff. Any maths was probably learned at school.

So while there were people who were driven and intelligent, they didn't come from academic backgrounds. I think I was one of the first at Codemasters who also had a degree but the university education was of little benefit in those days.

After a few years, though, the PSX devkit arrived and I started working on the PlayStation version of *Micro Machines*. Suddenly the stuff I learned at university didn't seem so irrelevant. You needed to know about 3D transformations, matrices, vectors etc. And now we were coding in C, rather than machine code, which was one of the 'high level' languages I had studied previously.

Not long after, Codemasters started recruiting heavily and exclusively from universities, and soon the place was full of people with a strong grasp of physics, maths and software engineering principles, and the whole culture of development changed radically. I think this is what allowed Codemasters to go on and succeed with titles such as *Colin McRae Rally*.

THE RACING ERA

TOCA TOURING CAR CHAMPIONSHIP

1997 · CODEMASTERS

Codemasters threw itself into PlayStation development and continued its racing tradition by striking a deal with the organisers of the British Touring Car Championship. Under the stewardship of producer Gavin Raeburn, the aim was to combine the realism of racing sims with the sheer fun of arcade racers and to say the 26-strong team achieved this is something of an understatement.

As befitting a PlayStation game, *TOCA* had a host of stunning 3D super touring cars which players could race at speed against 15 rivals in one of a number of modes that included a championship of 12 meetings. The dev paid great attention to detail, not only replicating names and teams but ensuring the cars handled as expected. It went down a storm, spawning many sequels. Codemasters' new racing era had begun.

COLIN MCRAE RALLY

1998 · CODEMASTERS

With players barely catching their breath after the exhilaration of *TOCA*, Codemasters pulled up with a game inspired by *Sega Rally*. Boasting the name of Colin McRae, the first British driver to win the World Rally Championship Drivers' title three years earlier, the game was, like *TOCA*, aiming to be a 'sim-cade' for want of a better word.

To keep things real, Richard Darling enrolled the devs at a rally school so they would get a feel for the motor sport. They also scouted the race locations so they could replicate them as authentically as possible. As with *TOCA*, *Colin McRae Rally* had many follow-ups, with games bearing the legend's name all the way through to 2009, two years after McRae's untimely death, aged 39.

INSANE

2000 · INVICTUS GAMES

Developed externally for Codemasters by a Hungarian company, *Insane* was a PC-only release which sought to drive sales by promising no limits, no rules and no roads. Infused with an accurate physics engine and a chaotic nature, this 4x4 racer burst into life in multiplayer mode, making use of Codemasters' network client software. There was much fun to be had smashing into others or racing around trying to grab the flag.

INDYCAR SERIES

2003 · BRAIN IN A JAR

By this point, Codemasters was really making a name for itself as a racing game developer given its ongoing flagship titles. It had also transitioned from the PlayStation to PS2 and started releasing games for the Xbox too, among them one of only a handful of titles to be based on open-wheel racing. Sure, *IndyCar Series* had videogamers driving round in circles, but it was nevertheless stacked with features.

RACE DRIVER 2006

2006 · SUMO DIGITAL

This exhilarating PSP release was an expanded version of *TOCA Race Driver 2* which had been released in 2004. As expected, it mixed a host of motorsports from Street Racing and Rally Cross to Formula Ford and V8 Supercars but the Codies ensured it excelled on the handheld by including a new single-player mode, 16 new vehicles and 10 new tracks. With great physics and detailed graphics, it raced to players' hearts.

RACE DRIVER: GRID

2008 · CODEMASTERS

The *TOCA Race Driver* series continued to evolve and the *TOCA* name eventually fell by the wayside across the world. In fact, the series, which continued until 2022, soon became known simply as *Grid* and it went from strength to strength. The 2008 release was like the driving equivalent of *Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time* since it introduced a rewind feature called Flashback. It allowed races to be paused and rewound by up to ten seconds.

FUEL

2009 · ASOBO STUDIO

This post-apocalyptic open-world racing game was certainly ambitious given that it had a terrain stretching a staggering 5,560 square miles. That feat earned it an entry in the Guinness World Records for having the largest playable area in a racing videogame. With its own weather system, dozens of vehicles and a multiplayer online mode for up to 16 players, it became a huge hit for the Codies, selling more than 690,000 copies.

F1 2009

2009 · SUMO DIGITAL

The Darlings sold their family shares in Codemasters in 2007 so they weren't at the company when it acquired the Formula 1 licence a year later. Yet this was another turning point for the Codies' racing credentials. The development team built upon the Neon game engine used in *Colin McRae: Dirt* to come up with Ego and it subsequently became used across the *F1*, *Dirt* and *Grid* franchises to handle advanced vehicle physics and damage modelling. Codemasters produced an *F1* title annually until 2025.

A Q&A WITH

GAVIN RAEBURN

GAVIN HEADED UP THE DIRT, GRID AND F1 SERIES OF GAMES AND IS NOW CEO AND HEAD OF STUDIO AT LIGHTHOUSE GAMES

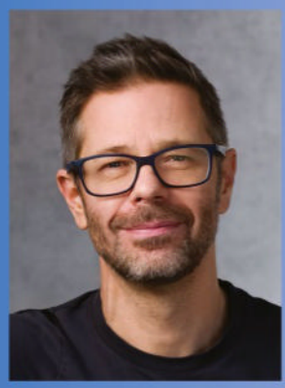


Photo Credit; Anastasia Jobson

Did Codemasters consciously decide to move more strongly towards racing?

There was no strategy to move particularly into racing games, but we knew games with recognisable, desirable licences, sold more copies. *Micro Machines* was a great example of a successful licence that boosted recognition and sales. Codemasters bought a number of licences at the time including BTCC (TOCA) and Colin McRae.

How did the idea for *TOCA* come about?

I felt that racing games at the time were generally rather predictable affairs. Either traditional arcade experiences, or at the other end, very simmy, clean racing. Both, of course, great but what I loved about BTCC was that it seemed to offer something different. It was full of personality, with close racing on typically short, interesting tracks. Collisions were also accepted as part of the sport, and it was all the better for it. BTCC was, and still is, a very exciting sport to watch.

I wanted to leverage this and make the game as authentic as we could, copying every aspect of the BTCC series. But we also needed to deliver an experience that appealed to a broad audience of gamers with different skillsets – to make every player feel like they were as accomplished as one of the BTCC racing drivers they watched each week on the TV. So the game couldn't be too hard and it needed to feel accessible.

We included a damage model for our cars, which we hadn't seen before in a mainstream driving game. We included real Ordnance survey data for the tracks which resulted in very believable circuits. And we had great access to all the drivers, manufacturers and cars of the BTCC series, so we soaked up the sport to the fullest. We tuned the handling to be as sim as we could with the very limited CPU power on PlayStation, but also making it playable on a PlayStation pad, which in those days just had on/off buttons.

Did *TOCA* help to define a Codemasters racing game?

Both *TOCA* and *Colin McRae* were breakout hits, triggering a golden period of growth for the company and paving the way for numerous sequels and new racing IP.

How did Codemasters stand out from the other racing game developers?

In a genre that often seems happy to stagnate, we were always working so hard to push the boundaries and expectations of what a racing game could be, and how the genre could be moved forward. We wanted to delight gamers with new gameplay mechanics, progression systems and graphical techniques to broaden our fanbase, and attract new players. Through this, we learned so much about what worked and didn't with our audience, which incrementally boosted the success of each new game that we developed.

A PUBLISHER WITH VERSATILITY

MUSIC

1998 · JESTER INTERACTIVE

As if to prove that gamers are a creative bunch, the sequencer game *Music* and its sequel *Music 2000*, are understood to have sold more than a million copies combined. The original release, for the PlayStation, was also nominated for a BAFTA and anyone who played around with it would understand why. Its simple interface and wide range of samples made it easy to knock out a decent tune.

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: COLD WAR CRISIS

2001 · BOHEMIA INTERACTIVE STUDIO

The tactical shooter and battlefield sim *Operation Flashpoint* was like a breath of fresh air when it arrived early in the 21st century. It helped to bring elite military games into the modern era, redefining the genre thanks, in the main, to its no holds-barred realistic take on combat.

Reflecting on the mid-Eighties rivalry between the USA and the Soviet Union, this open-world game had players scrambling on the ground, flying helicopters and driving tanks as part of a squad tasked with completing many varied missions. Expansions soon followed, then, in 2009 and 2011, Codemasters released sequels.

Bohemia Interactive Studio fell out with the Codies', however, and went its own way, producing a sequel, *Arma: Armed Assault* in 2006. The dev also rereleased the original as *Arma: Cold War Assault* in 2011 and shared the source code to the game on GitHib in June 2026.

SENSIBLE SOCCER 2006

2006 · KUJI SHEFFIELD

Codemasters acquired Sensible Software in 1999 and, as well as releasing *Sensible World Of Soccer* on the Xbox 360 via Xbox Live Arcade in 2007, it commissioned Kuji Sheffield to develop *Sensible Soccer 2006*. The original creator, Jon Hare oversaw the game's design and, while it was never a *FIFA* or *PES* beater, it was a true modern take on the popular football classic, this time using cel-shaded cartoon-like footballers.

Up to four players could engage in some breathtakingly fast matches, during which the viewing angle meant precision passing soon became second nature. With the simple controls allowing 360-degree control over kicks and movement and all manner of tricks such as diving headers, scissor kicks, back heels and dummies, it was amazingly good fun.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR

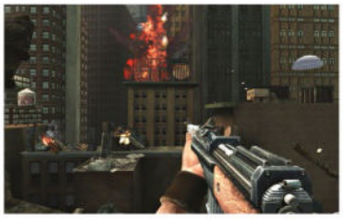
2007 · TURBINE, INC

The massively multiplayer online game, *The Lord Of The Rings Online: Shadows Of Angmar*, was published by Codemasters Online Gaming in Europe for more than three years, taking players beyond JRR Tolkien's classic books and allowing them to interact with many of the beloved characters including Gandalf. Recreating Middle-earth in gorgeous detail, it soon became a smash hit, switching to a free-to-play model in 2010 and effectively taking on a life of its own. While the game has long been out of Codemasters' hands, it continues to be updated and played today.

CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO

2007 · MERCURYSTEAM

Although it didn't set the world alight, it wasn't for the want of trying. This first-person, squad-based, on-rails shooter was heavily promoted and much was made of writer and filmmaker Clive Barker's involvement – it was based on his artistic vision and had amazing graphics. Yet this horror title, despite showing great potential, ultimately fell short and a refusal to cut brutal scenes from the game effectively earned it a ban in Germany.



TURNING POINT: FALL OF LIBERTY

2008 · SPARK UNLIMITED

This alternate history first-person shooter for the Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and PC was another interesting effort. The Codies went all-out with *Turning Point*, producing lavish trailers showing the Luftwaffe heading towards the US and the Statue Of Liberty adorned with a swastika – details that certainly turned heads. The game's grappling mechanic was a particularly fun way to dispatch enemies, allowing for instant takedowns and environmental kills.

OVERLORD: FELLOWSHIP OF EVIL

2015 · CODEMASTERS

You can see why Codemasters began to lean on its immense ability to create racing games as time went on. *Overlord* had been conceived as a fantasy action role-playing series in 2007 and Overlord II, two years later, had been brilliantly written by Rhianna Pratchett. But then *Fellowship Of Evil* arrived, switched the game from a third-person perspective to a top-down view and turned the title into a tedious slog. It was the last non-racing game Codemasters ever made.

EA SPORTS WRC

2023 · CODEMASTERS

Impressed by its racing credentials, EA bought Codemasters in 2021 for a whopping $1.2 billion and one of the standout games to be released following that deal was *EA Sports WRC* which marked the return of the *World Rally Championship* licence. The game was critically acclaimed but sales were sluggish, prompting EA to halt Codemasters' development of future rally titles in 2025. Codemasters is now said to be focussing entirely on a new *F1* game for 2027.

A Q&A WITH

ROD COUSENS

ROD WAS CEO OF CODEMASTERS FROM MAY 2005 TO MARCH 2015.

What was your first impression of Codemasters and what did you think the company needed to do to survive and grow?
The influence of the Darling family was very much in evidence and the company's strength was in its development talent with a hobbyist approach to content which hitherto it had been able to fund from self-generating cash flow. The advent of next-generation platforms changed that and the rising cost of product creation meant the continuation of brand exploitation was only going to happen by bringing in external investment. This manifested itself with venture capital being provided by Benchmark Capital.

The games were Euro-centric in their appeal, if not UK-centric for the most part. To get a return on investment they needed to reach a global audience and be across multiple platforms with multiple business models and that required new skills, technology, systems and processes. The development teams operated in isolation, often at odds with each other and that led to inefficiencies and burn out. We introduced a new management team, built new engines, rotated teams who shared common tools and technologies. We upgraded the site and facilities to improve working conditions. Above all, we stood out and competed on quality and achieved recognition in doing so.

How important was online multiplayer in shaping Codemasters' strategy during the Noughties?
Codemasters had the foresight to recognise the importance of multiplayer and its entrance to that space was highly cost effective, partnering on *Lord of The Rings Online* with Turbine. Codemasters learnt on the job, set up a division with a team which had the skills and understanding gained in the European market that few others possessed and it worked to their advantage. This was then leveraged across its own first party IP giving it a lead in the European market at least.

The company had a rounded portfolio that included combat military sims, RPGs, classic revivals such as *Sensible Soccer 2006*, *Brian Lara* and so on. How did you decide what would belong to the Codemasters portfolio?
Codemasters were great product scouts and had fans in the development community. They were able to gain their niche with titles such as *Operation Flashpoint* from Bohemia in the shooters category and *Sensible Soccer*, *Brian Lara Cricket* and *LMA* in sports. David and Richard Darling and their team should get great credit for this and for nurturing those relationships.

But Codemasters increasingly became synonymous with racing games. How transformative was getting the Formula 1 licence?
I thought we could win in the racing category. We feared no one. The competition could not create games of this quality at the cost we could and certainly not in the time frames. In looking to maximise our racing strengths we needed a flagship property and we thought F1 was perfect. We had all the tools, technology and in-house talent to do it. We had new ideas to bring to the game as prior iterations had become jaded and more of the same year on year. We reached out to F1 and we knew we could be outbid but we also knew that wasn't the case on the game quality, design and marketing. F1 recognised how much it meant to us and they were aware of the standing of Codemasters in racing.

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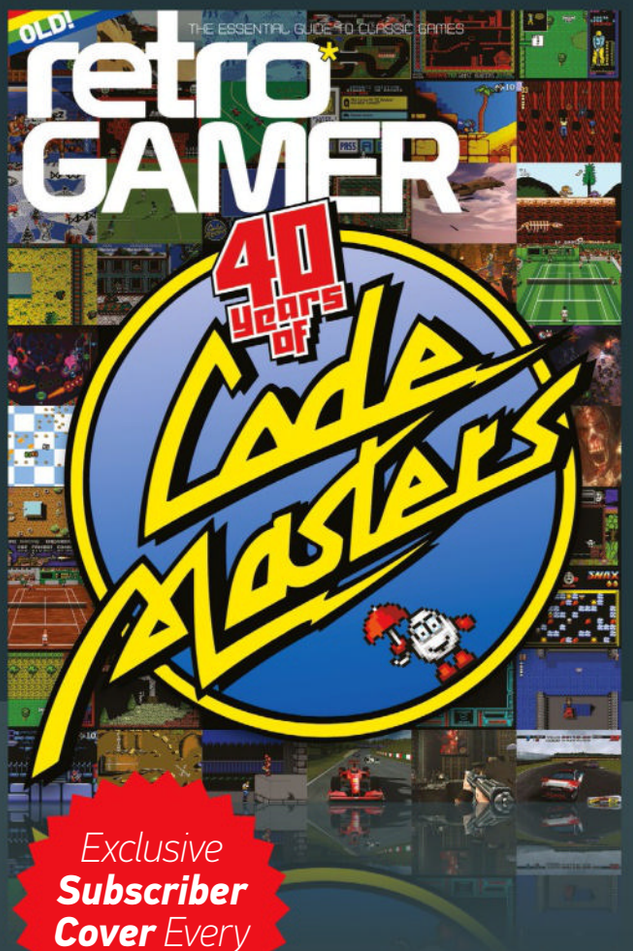

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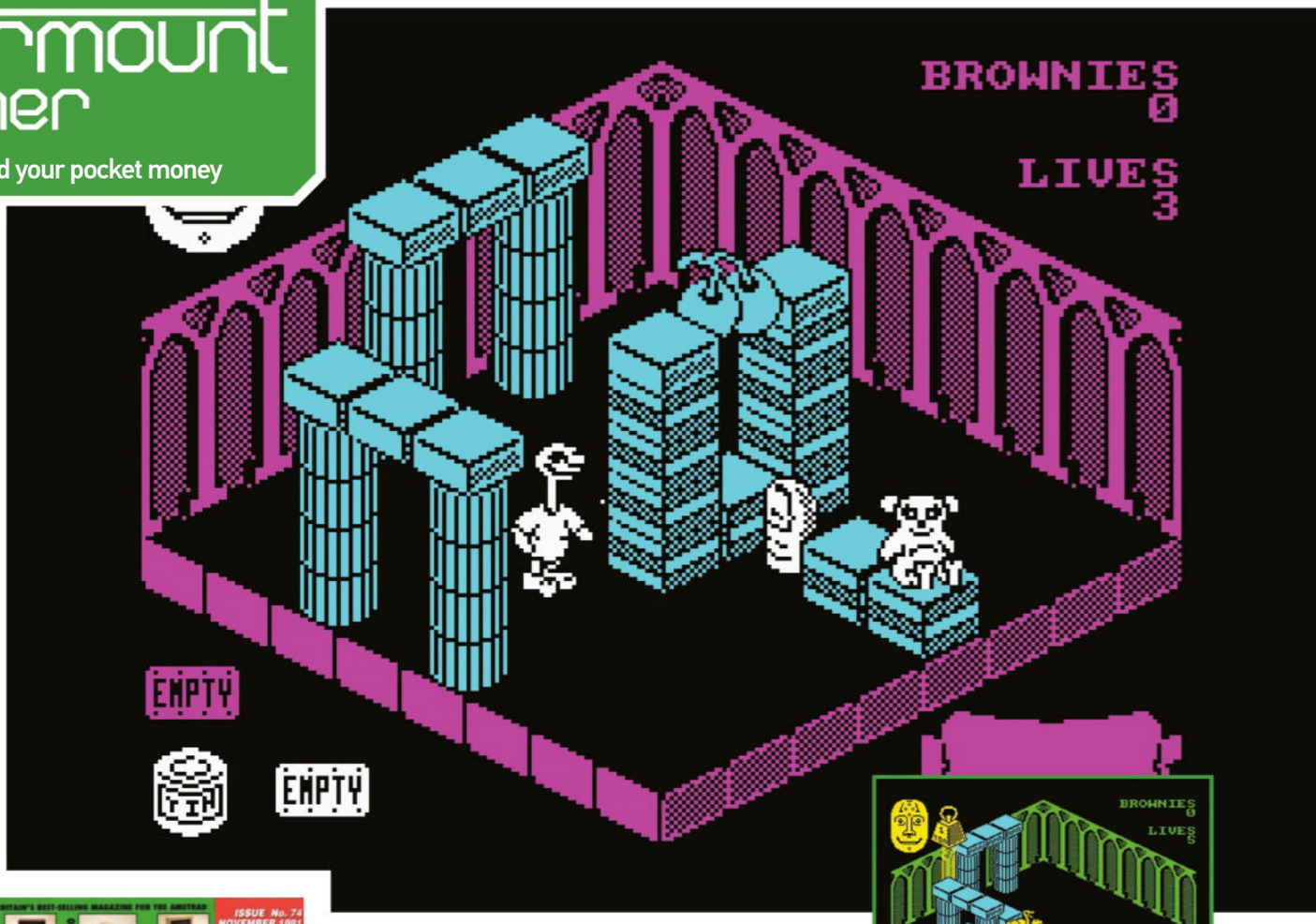
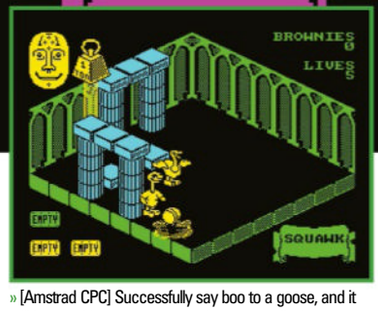
Covermount Corner

The best way to spend your pocket money



» [Amstrad CPC] A teddy bear! But you've got to get up there and dodge that pointy finger if you want it.

AMSTRAD ACTION #74



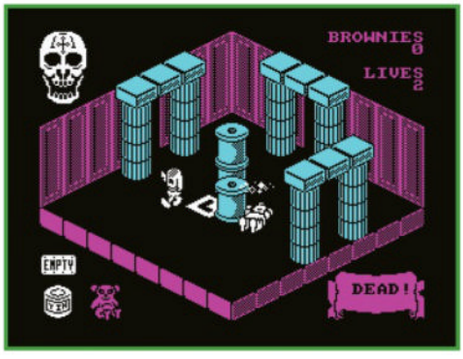
» [Amstrad CPC] Successfully say boo to a goose, and it will lay a golden egg, or erg as the game calls them.

COVERTAPES LET YOU TRY ALL KINDS OF INTERESTING GAMES, FROM SMASH-HIT ARCADE CONVERSIONS, TO SLOWER ADVENTURES AND BIZARRE EXPERIMENTAL ONE-OFFS. ALL OF THOSE, AND A COUPLE OF KILLER APPLICATIONS, ARE ON SHOW FOR THE AMSTRAD IN THIS MONTH'S COVERMOUNT CORNER. ENJOY

WORDS BY JAMES KONIK

THIS MONTH IN NOVEMBER 1991

Mags were under pressure in late-1991, with Newsfield's closure hitting *Crash* and *Zzap!64*. Elsewhere, tycoon Robert Maxwell's death would have implications for gaming as Mirrorsoft, publisher of this month's Turtles demo, fell into receivership. There was also a minor scandal as an *Amstrad Action* reader attempted to win £20 with a type-in pinched from Amstrad's manual. The tape is strong though, with the Turtles joined by quirky classic *Sweevo's World*, and the weird explore-'em-up *Terror Of The Deep*. There were also two apps, a music tool and a full art package, to enjoy.



» [Amstrad CPC] Enemies in Sweevo's World are very quick, and the goose-stepping dictator isn't easy to escape from.

THE MAIN EVENT: SWEEVO'S WORLD

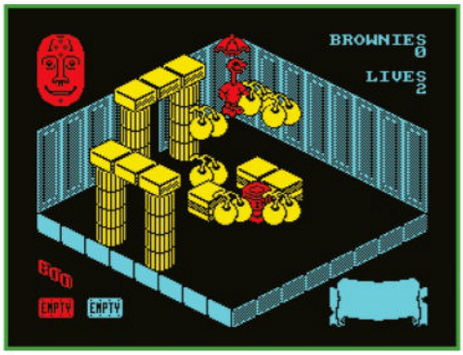
This month's big game was *Sweevo's World*, an early isometric adventure that scored 90% in *Amstrad Action* in February 1986, and also won *CVG*'s prized Game Of The Month award. Developer Gargoyle Games had made its name with the *Tir Na Nog* series, but switched over to an isometric perspective for *Sweevo's World*. Roy Carter did the code and Greg Follis handled graphics and design.

You play as SWEEVO, a robot or Self Willed Extreme Environment Vocational Organism, who's been given the task of sorting out Knutz Folly, a problem planet, overrun with all sorts of strange enemies. Your task is to eliminate the genetic experiments that have run amok.

SWEEVO looks suspiciously like Stan Laurel on the game's packaging, but his head is elongated the other way in the game world. It's odd, but then so is the game.

There are brownies that get you brownie points, goose-stepping dictators and an actual goose that you can say boo to, along with several bowls worth of deadly fruit. Fingers poke through the floor at you and there are weights lurking dangerously above.

It's certainly hard going, with few lives and unforgiving puzzles from the off. Unlike many similar games, you can't jump or shoot, so



» [Amstrad CPC] The levels are full of fruit, but unusually in *Sweevo's World*, they're a hazard not a boon.

must make full use of your cunning as you explore the sprawling map of almost 200 screens. It soon gels though, and once you figure out its secrets it's a compelling quest.

Sweevo's World was one of the earliest games to follow in the footsteps of Ultimate's revolutionary *Knight Lore*. Its humour was particularly unique, with one reviewer describing it as the first time they'd laughed at a game. Though not widely celebrated today, once you figure out its many tricks, *Sweevo's World* will be yours to conquer.

PLAY THIS NEXT: TURTLES 2: THE COIN OP DEMO

Things didn't get bigger than the *Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles* in 1991, and games didn't get much hotter than the home conversion of Konami's spectacular four-player coin-op. The demo includes the first level, and lets two players fight as Leo and Mikey, though *Amstrad Action* seemed a bit sketchy on that point. You're fighting through a burning building on your way to rescue April. Probe did a sterling job of recreating the side-scrolling brawler, despite being tied to the ill-fated Mirrorsoft and once readers fought past the multicoloured members of the Foot Clan and defeated the Roadkill Rodneys, they'd likely be aching to try the full game, which scored 91% in the mag. ✱

» [Amstrad CPC] Master the flying kick, and even the Roadkill Rodneys will fall swiftly.

» [Amstrad CPC] The Foot Clan are a dangerous bunch, so it's much better to play with a friend.

Covermount HIGHLIGHTS

THE BEST OF THE REST

TERROR OF THE DEEP

■ There's more than just Nessie in Loch Ness. In this Mirrorsoft-published adventure by Mr Micro Ltd, you take control of a diving vehicle investigating reports of strange creatures after a meteor shower. Notable for an excellent interface where you control the craft by interacting directly with the controls, it's unusually tactile. *Terror Of The Deep* is all about juggling plates. Aside from managing your speed, pitch and ballast, there's an oxygen pump to keep an eye on, and an energy wheel to spin to keep your battery powered. You've also got a selection of weapons, if you're fortunate enough to find your prey before it finds you.

DRUMKIT

■ Originally a type-in, this excellent and surprisingly intuitive music package lets you build percussion tracks quickly. You move the beats directly with the arrow keys and its intuitive nature means it takes very little time to figure out.

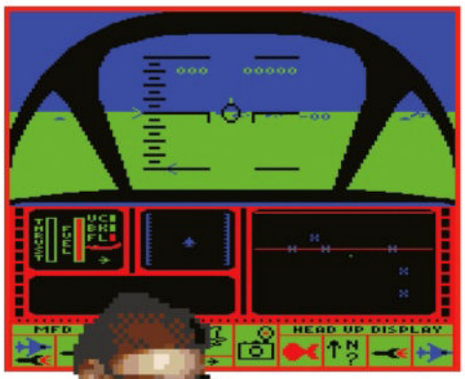
SMART 2

■ Robert Buckley's type-in art package included with issue 74 is actually a very impressive achievement for the 8-bit days. As well as including free drawing, the clever little package features lines, shapes and a handy spray-can tool.

ROWAN SOFTWARE

Starting off as a small developer and publisher of educational games for the 32K BBC Micro, H&H Software evolved into the UK's leading developer of 16-bit flight simulators. Learn how Rowan Software took off and conquered superiority in the air

WORDS BY RICHARD C HEWISON



» [BBC Micro] *Strike Force Harrier* was an early calling card for H&H and intended as an introduction to flight sims.

Rod Hyde's interest in chemistry led to an early career as a chemical engineer, working for ICI and becoming a plant manager. But by then, Rod's fascination with computers had been ignited whilst studying at the University Of Leeds. He showed a natural aptitude for programming, and he now had a yearning to change direction. "By the early Eighties I realised that I wasn't getting the opportunities that I really wanted. The chemical industry was going through a bad patch, and I decided I needed to go somewhere else."

Rod's wife Mary was a teacher, and so he retrained as a physics and mathematics teacher, but that vocation only lasted a few years. "Coding was like a drug to me, and I couldn't get enough," says Rod. "I had an article published in *Your Computer* in May 1982 that created magic squares on the ZX81. At the end, I added that I would send a tape with similar programmes for £3.50."

That suggestion led to the creation of H&H Software, a joint endeavour between Rod and his wife. "Mary did the testing, the marketing and the sales, and I did the programming," explains Rod. H&H produced a handful of titles for the BBC Micro, but it was its association with the recently launched Mirrorsoft label that proved pivotal. The Robert Maxwell-owned software publisher had spotted H&H adverts in the magazines, and Steve Mercer offered to release H&H's future titles, giving them a professional distribution and publishing deal. "I was still teaching, and Steve came up to talk through the idea. Steve and Jim Mackonochie

GAMES TO DISCOVER FROM CONVERSIONS TO FLIGHT SIMS

STRIKE FORCE HARRIER
BBC MICRO, 1986

■ Rod wrote the BBC Micro original, creating a simple introduction to flight simulators for 8-bit players.

SPITFIRE 40
BBC MICRO, ACORN ELECTRON (CONVERSION), 1987

■ Rod's first WWII simulator, but his last 8-bit simulator before moving to the 16-bits.

TETRIS
BBC MICRO, 1987

■ Rowan's first game saw it converting the classic puzzler and avoiding the later console conversions controversy.

FALCON
ATARI ST, AMIGA, 1988

■ The 16-bit conversions of the popular PC F-16 simulator proved to be an extremely huge hit for Rowan.

» [BBC Micro] Rowan Software started off life as H&H, making games like *Spitfire 40* for the BBC Micro.

» [PC] Rowan visited France for photographic research to make *Flying Corps* as authentic as possible..

asked me to leave teaching and build a team, which grew as we took on more projects," remembers Rod happily.

The first major project after writing a *Mr Men* educational title was based on the new *Biggles* film. "We designed and coded the second part. Steve told us the film plot in broad terms, and we built a game based on the German's sound weapon," says Rod. The movie struggled at the box office, but Mirrorsoft was happy with what Rod produced, and their working relationship blossomed. "Mirrorsoft's Chairman Jim Mackonochie and I became good friends. I loved coding and he loved flying. Jim wanted to sell flight simulations and so we moved in that direction," says Rod.

> "We designed and coded the second part [of Biggles]. Steve told us the film plot in broad terms, and we built a game based on the German's sound weapon"
> **Rod Hyde**

Strike Force Harrier was H&H Software's first flight simulator, written by Rod for the 32K BBC Micro. It proved a challenge, but several clever technical savings claimed back precious kilobytes, including basing the flight model on a rocket rather than an aeroplane. During development, Mirrorsoft MD and former Royal Naval officer Jim Mackonochie arranged for a Falklands War pilot to speak to Rod about how to fly a Harrier Jump Jet, which was then incorporated into the game. "The BBC version took me three months to write and was probably one of the most financially successful games I ever did," admits Rod.

Next up were BBC and Electron conversions of Mirrorsoft's *Spitfire 40* simulator. Despite only having graphical assets to work from, both conversions were completed on schedule, and then H&H transformed into Rowan Software, starting with a fresh identity and significantly elevated ambitions. "At the time, it was quite fashionable to name companies after fruits, so we thought we'd go for a tree," says Rod.

Rowan's first release was converting *Tetris* to the BBC Micro, but it needed to expand immediately after. "That was a time of significant change," remembers Rod. "The team grew enormously. Not only did we need coders capable of writing in 16-bit machine language, but we also needed artists and opportunities for sound and music were also growing."

New programmers included Colin Bell, Chris Orton and Dave Whiteside. "It was my first real job in the industry," says Dave. "I had been doing part-time hotel work previously but was applying for technical work and I had provided some coding examples on a floppy disk, and Rowan were the first company to show an interest."

Dave's first job was to work on Rowan's debut 16-bit flight simulator. *Falcon* came its way thanks to Robert Maxwell's majority shareholding in US corporation Sphere Inc, owner of Spectrum Holobyte which had recently published the PC F-16 flight simulator *Falcon*. Mirrorsoft needed 16-bit conversions for distribution in Europe. With a strong and enthusiastic new team, Rowan coded the

FALCON MISSION DISKS
ATARI ST, AMIGA, 1989/90

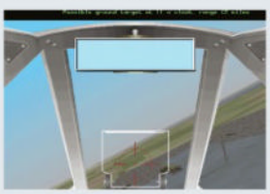
■ *Operation Counterstrike* and *Operation Firefight* offered 12 new missions each and plenty of new features.

FLIGHT OF THE INTRUDER
ATARI ST, AMIGA, PC, 1991

■ Rowan's first original flight simulator and its first PC game, based during the Vietnam War.

REACH FOR THE SKIES
ATARI ST, AMIGA, PC, 1992

■ An ambitious effort where you could fly for the Royal Air Force or the German Luftwaffe during the Battle Of Britain.



OVERLORD
AMIGA, PC, 1994

■ This interesting simulator lets you take part in the air assault during the D-Day landings in the summer of 1944.

DAWN PATROL
AMIGA, PC, 1994

■ Step back to the debut of air warfare during World War I. A head-to-head version was also released.

DUSTING OFF

THE FORGOTTEN STORY OF DUSTER, THE LOST PROJECT BY REALTIME GAMES

As development on *Reach For The Skies* was in full swing during the summer of 1991, Rowan Software was offered the chance to rescue a Mirrorsoft project that was floundering. *Duster* was a solid 3D game for the PC, Amiga and Atari ST from Realtime Games, programmers and co-designers of the hugely successful *Carrier Command* game published by Rainbird Software. Unfortunately, Realtime was unable to complete the work on *Duster* and so Rowan was asked to step in and complete the project. "The team were very excited to get involved because there was a feeling among a few that they'd done enough flight sims and wanted to do something different, something more gamey," says Rod. "Ironically this was just before we went on to produce our best flight simulators!"

Unfortunately, the events that enforced the closure of Mirrorsoft at the end of that year meant that Rowan only ever produced one new development version of *Duster* on the PC in the autumn, and when it came to moving *Reach For The Skies* to another publisher the following year, *Duster* was left behind to literally gather dust, never to be seen again.

» [PC] *Air Power* extrapolated the airships of the early 20th century and created an alternative history.

conversions from scratch, with Rod visiting Spectrum Holobyte in the States near the end to complete last-minute fine-tuning. The Amiga and Atari ST *Falcon* conversions were very successful, and Rowan then produced two original mission disks – *Operation Counterstrike* and *Operation Firefight*.

Rod and Mary had renovated a three-storey high Georgian cottage in Runcorn, and Rod started coding in the attic, but with over 20 people working for Rowan by the late-Eighties, that had to change. "We started looking and bought and renovated 67 High Street, Runcorn and that remained Rowan's home for thirteen years," says Rod.

After *Falcon*, Rowan designed and produced *Flight Of The Intruder* for the ST, Amiga and PC, based on the novel by former US Naval aviator Stephen Coonts and set during the Vietnam War. "I had a long telephone conversation with Steve about Vietnam," says Rod. "I remember Steve telling me that pilots were rated according to how well they landed on the aircraft carrier. In those days they didn't know where the bombs went and so they couldn't rate them for actual effectiveness."

Aside from the eponymous A-6 Intruder, *Flight Of The Intruder* also offered the F-4 Phantom. The game received excellent reviews, no doubt helped by the release in early 1991 of a movie also based on the book, starring Danny Glover, Willem Dafoe and Rosanna Arquette. "Following the work we did on the F-4 in *Flight Of The Intruder*, the RAF asked us to produce a training aid for the navigators," adds Rod. "We developed a bespoke joystick that was like the real thing, and we then simulated the radar screen. Trainees were able to practise interceptions."

> "Following the work we did on the F-4 in Flight Of The Intruder, the RAF asked us to produce a training aid for the navigators"
> **Rod Hyde**

With two successful flight simulators completed under the Rowan Software banner, its next project was to feature the Battle Of Britain

GAMES TO DISCOVER

AIR POWER
PC, 1995

An alternative timeline where airships rule the skies and fictitious fighter planes fight for supremacy.

NAVY STRIKE
PC, 1995

Rowan heads back to the modern era, letting players fly a US F-18 fighter that launches from an aircraft carrier.

FLYING CORPS
PC, 1997

This lets you fly half-a-dozen WW1 aircraft across different campaigns. An updated 'Gold' version was also released.

MIG ALLEY
PC, 1999

Rowan's game pits P-51 Mustangs and F-86 Sabrejets against different MIGs, and is set during the Korean War.

ROWAN'S BATTLE OF BRITAIN
PC, 2000

A second Battle of Britain simulation turned out to be the studio's last game.

» [Amiga] The *Falcon* mission disks added not only new missions, but new terrain and new weaponry.

» [PC] Dogfighting in the early pioneering days of aerial warfare was full of dangerous combat.

» [Amiga] *Flight Of The Intruder* gave a full mission summary for eager fighter pilots before take-off.

» [Amiga] Equipping your F-16 fighter with the right armaments was critical to mission success.

» [CDTV] The CDTV version of *Falcon* had all the mission disks, CD-quality speech and new graphics.

during the summer of 1940. Mirrorsoft signed *Reach For The Skies* for the ST, Amiga and PC but contract negotiations proved difficult for the first time. "There was one particular clause which said that if Rowan went bust then the IP would go to Mirrorsoft," recalls Rod. "I said, 'Well that's not very fair. Why can't we make that clause mutual so if you go bust the IP comes to me or Rowan?'" That change was agreed, and it would later prove crucial.

Reach For The Skies gave the player the chance to fly a Spitfire or Hurricane fighter plane for the RAF, or a Ju 87, Ju 88, Do 17 or He 111 Bomber aircraft for the Luftwaffe. If the player wanted a more strategic influence in the game, they could also direct operations from a control room before jumping into a cockpit and flying each mission. Those additions expanded the scope of the game to even greater heights. In tandem, Dave Whiteside also took on the bulk of work required to produce a special CDTV version of *Falcon*, incorporating the original missions, the two mission disks, extra graphics (provided by Mirrorsoft's in-house resident artist Alan Tomkins) and additional CD-quality speech.

Unfortunately, events elsewhere meant that Rod and his team were soon facing an uncertain future. Robert Maxwell went missing on 5 November 1991, and it was later confirmed that he had fallen off his yacht and drowned. Administrators stepped in and took control of all the Mirror Group companies, including Mirrorsoft in late-November. Whilst Mirrorsoft was in a financially healthy position, the administrators discovered huge losses elsewhere and Mirrorsoft was permanently shut at the end of December, making all the employees immediately redundant. That could have been disastrous, but Rowan successfully argued that *Reach For The Skies* was its own IP and so it could be taken elsewhere. "That amended contract clause saved us because *Reach For The Skies* was nearly finished," says Rod. Jon Norledge was managing the games department at Mirrorsoft when the administrators took control, and he began working for Virgin Games in early 1992 along with several other former Mirrorsoft colleagues. "Jon really helped smooth the whole process and we ended up signing *Reach For The Skies* with Virgin Games," adds Rod. Unfortunately, the stress of those months of uncertainty took a terrible toll on Rod. "I had a heart attack, a real bad one because of Maxwell parting company with his boat. But we found a way back and Rowan had its best years in the mid-Nineties."

Rod averted a near-fatal disaster personally and professionally, and Virgin Games published *Reach For The Skies* in 1992. With each new flight simulator release, the team were

» [PC] Sitting in the gunner position in *Flying Corps* gave hints as to the enemy's location.

» [PC] External views of your aircraft in *MIG Alley* looked stunning and were useful for orientation.

» [PC] Heading for a bogie rendezvous at 12 o'clock in Rowan's *Naval Strike* simulator.

» [PC] Approaching the coast of Normandy in *Overlord* as part of the D-Day operation.

tweaking and improving their code. Rowan's next game was *Overlord*, again for Virgin Games. Based on the Allies' Operation Overlord at Normandy during the summer of 1944, Rowan's game depicted the airborne assault which was executed in tandem with the ground assault to liberate France and the rest of Europe.

One of the first lessons learned was to avoid having multiple projects with one publisher. "We were developing *Overlord* for Virgin, *Dawn Patrol* for Empire, *Air Power* for Mindscape, *Flying Corps* and what ended up as *Navy Strike* originally for Microprose but eventually published by Empire," explains Rod. Out of those titles, *Air Power* was a slight departure as it wasn't based on historical events or real aircraft. "That was an interesting idea," starts Rod. "It was set in an alternative reality where supremacy was from the air. It was natural to have these air balloons instead of aircraft carriers. The flight simulator model we used wasn't changed much, although to be able to fly and land on a hook meant that the collision detection routines had to be fine-tuned.

"On *Flying Corps*, we spent a lot of time getting the landscape period accurate," says Rod. "We found some slides at the Imperial War Museum, showing large tranches of the battlefields. We converted them into landscape

THE DNA OF ROWAN SOFTWARE

WHAT MADE THE STUDIO TICK?

BBC TITLES

■ Starting out as H&H Software, Rod began by creating educational games for the BBC Micro and Electron. It proved to be a shrewd move and the studio was noticed by Mirrorsoft, which led to more BBC Micro and Electron games, as well as releases on the 16-bit formats.

HISTORICAL SETTINGS

■ Before period flight simulators became a part of the staple product range, Rod designed and created the final minigame for the *Biggles: Adventures In Time* movie tie-in, set during the Great War (World War I). It was already Rod's third game set in the past.

DESIGN FORESIGHT

■ The original Falcon had 12 missions, and when Rowan designed the ST and Amiga conversions it included from the outset the ability to insert extra disks that would provide new missions. *Operation Counterstrike* and *Operation Firefight* added 24 new missions, making 36 in total.

files, but we needed buildings, so we went over to France, drove around and photographed several big old chateaus and houses to put into the game."

Despite the increase in productivity, the late-Nineties became challenging. Tastes and technology were rapidly changing. "We didn't take much interest in consoles, which was a mistake," admits Rod. "We thought of consoles as being for games rather than sims. We were wrong. Videogames moved on to consoles and the PC game developers were left high and dry. Our customer base disappeared over the next couple of years."

> "I wasn't interested in developing arcade-type games, but my team was. Selling the company to Empire and for us to move on seemed the best solution"
> **Rod Hyde**

Rowan's *Battle Of Britain* was its second go at that vital moment in British history. "I was the main designer. The key thing we did was simulate a thousand bomber raids," says Rod. The relationship with Empire had strengthened over the years, but the difficulties faced by the flight simulator market eventually put that relationship under stress. It was just before the turn of the new millennium that Rod and Mary came to a decision about where their future lay. "I wasn't interested in developing arcade-type games, but my team was. Selling the company to Empire and for us to move on seemed the best solution."

Dave Whiteside worked on every Rowan flight simulator. "When Rowan ended, some of us formed a new development team called Strangelite." His memories of working for Rowan are happy ones though, and he adds "It was a great time to be in the industry when I worked for Rod and Mary. As a small company we all got on."

Rod and Mary left before Rowan's *Battle Of Britain* was published, and Rod now looks back at his tenure with pride. "In the early days, expectations were low, graphics were crude, and the only important thing was the gameplay. We always asked, 'Does the game make you want to play again?' As time progressed, graphics, sound, music and flight models were improved. But it was still the gameplay that was important. Our best were the last three, starting with *Flying Corps*. We had a very sophisticated model that was informed by a data sheet so different aircraft types behaved differently even though they were flying the same model."

Rowan Software's legacy is a collection of flight simulators to suit anyone with a yearning to get out into the wild blue yonder. With each successive release, new features were added and realism levels raised. Each game entertained and educated in equal measure, reflecting the history of aviation and critical moments in world history. But the most important thing was that the developers and the players had fun doing it. ✱

Richard C Hewison wrote the manuals for *Reach For The Skies* and *Air Power*, and playtested *Reach For The Skies* and *Overlord*.

» [PC] In *Reach For The Skies*, you can also be part of the mission planning.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW

HERE'S WHAT HAPPENED TO ROD AND DAVE AFTER ROWAN SOFTWARE CLOSED

ROD HYDE

After selling Rowan Software to Empire Interactive in 2000, Rod became involved in fundraising and venture capital markets, before setting up a digital and communication services business. Later, he split his time between being a non-executive chair of three technology companies and voluntary work. Rod remains fascinated with technology and is exploring the possibilities that AI has to offer.

DAVE WHITESIDE

Leaving Rowan Software soon after the sale to Empire Interactive, Dave went on to form development team Strangelite, which produced Sega conversions for the PC over the next six years and a *Starship Troopers* game for Empire. When Strangelite was acquired by publishing powerhouse Rebellion in 2006, Dave transitioned into being Rebellion's network manager for almost two decades.

CONSTANT EVOLUTION

■ Encouraged by Mirrorsoft Chairman Jim Mackonochie, Rowan quickly became experts in flight simulators, but the sophistication of the simulators became more complex as the computer hardware got more powerful. Flight sim aficionados initially dismissed the older simpler flight models but embraced the later games.

FLIGHT SIMULATORS

■ It seems obvious, but Rowan's brief flirtation with 8-bit games was quickly pushed aside once it began developing its range of flight simulators for the 16-bit market. Fourteen simulators in fourteen years covering World War I, World War II and modern fighter planes for multiple formats tells its own story.

Sensible Soccer

FITTING IN WITH FOOTBALL

» **AMIGA** » **1994** » **SENSIBLE SOFTWARE**

I've mentioned in past issues that I've never really enjoyed football. I hated playing it at school, due to being rubbish at it, and any interest I had in watching league games with my grandad soon evaporated once I realised success seemed largely down to a club's money and resources. And yet, I've been enjoying this year's World Cup, as I enjoy all World Cups. There's something about the very best of the best all being pulled together to play for their country that I really enjoy, and while I'll never understand why the managers are allowed to come from different countries to the players, I still watch matches when I can.

When I had my Amiga, *Sensible Soccer* rarely left the disk drive. While not the most realistic version of the game (like I'd know anyway) it's fun, fast-paced and wonderfully slick. It was also an amazing icebreaker as people from work would often come over to my mum's house for no other reason than to play it with me after I mentioned I owned the game. I knew that these weren't proper friendships, but the game was so much better when you were playing against someone and my friends weren't always free, as my days off were often different to theirs.

So *Sensible Soccer* became a way for me to appear 'normal' in front of my peers because I was taking an interest in something other people my age enjoyed and I wasn't just obsessing about playing Dungeons & Dragons or normal videogames like I typically did during lunchtimes at Tesco.

Even today, I use football games as a way to break the ice with people. My ASD makes me atrociously bad at small talk, but if I know one of my wife's friends likes football (and most of them do) I'll simply ask if they fancy a game of *Pro Evo*, or whatever else I have to hand, put it on and simply listen to them go on about the beautiful game. Small talk avoided. The happy ending to this story is that thanks to Evercade's *Codemasters Collection 1* cartridge, *Sensible Soccer* is once again back in rotation. ✱

THE MAKING OF FISH

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** RAINBIRD / VIRGIN (MAGNETIC WINDOWS RERELEASE)
- **DEVELOPER:** MAGNETIC SCROLLS
- **PLATFORM:** AMIGA, VARIOUS
- **RELEASED:** 1988
- **GENRE:** ADVENTURE GAME

HAVING ESTABLISHED ITSELF WITH FANTASY-BASED ADVENTURES, MAGNETIC SCROLLS DIPPED ITS TOES IN ABSURDIST COMEDY WITH THIS PISCINE TALE OF INTERGALACTIC INTRIGUE. WHO BETTER THAN YOUR SINCLAIR'S CHIEF PUN WRITER PHIL SOUTH TO HELP BRING IT TO LIFE?

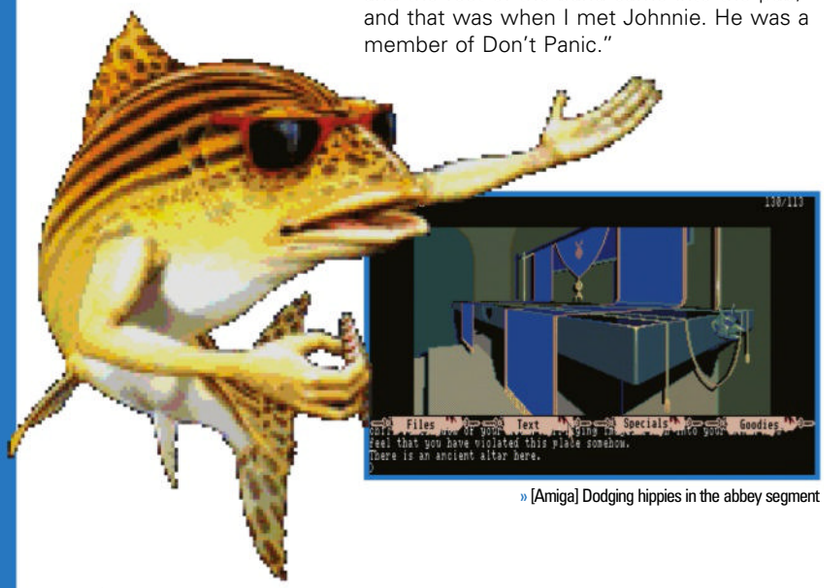
WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

To tell the story of Magnetic Scrolls' *Fish*, we need to go all the way back to the summer of 1980, and the King's Arms pub in Hemel Hempstead High Street. Working behind the bar of this fine establishment was Phil South, before the ZX Spectrum, before *Your Sinclair*, before the Empire, before, just about, everything. "I'd been mates with a guy called Paul Human since we'd been about five," begins Phil. "That wasn't a stage name, that was his actual name. To date, he's the only Human I've met." The pair fostered a love of music as they grew up. When Paul answered an advert in a local newspaper (for a vocalist in a synthesiser group – it was the early Eighties, after all), he subsequently joined a band called Don't Panic. "Then one day, Paul and the rest of the band came into the pub, and that was when I met Johnnie. He was a member of Don't Panic."

With Phil becoming Don't Panic's photographer, he struck up a friendship with John Molloy, helped by his father's work. "Johnnie's house was amazing, because his parents were quite well off. His business was renting out coin-op machines – one-arm bandits and such, but also arcade machines. It was part of my charmed life: I made friends with someone who's got almost every arcade machine in their garage! I wasn't going to pass that up, and we hung out a lot together."

Like Phil, John was also interested in computers, eventually persuading his father that one would really help, not with his homework, but with accounts for the business. "He first got a Challenger 1P [a low-cost micro from Ohio Scientific], then an Apple II. We used to play adventure games on those computers, because they were the most interesting games up to that point, as the graphics weren't up to much." Having already dabbled with the legendary *Advent* (or, *Colossal Cave Adventure*), Phil took to the Apple II in particular, spending hours alongside John, both absorbed with Infocom's famous *Zork* series. "We played one called *Enchanter*, and literally sat up all night playing it, until it was done. That was fairly immersive, you could say!"

We fast forward to 1986. Phil has joined *Your Sinclair*, but with the magazine having a dedicated adventure game writer, Mike Gerrard, he focusses mainly on arcade games for the ZX Spectrum. Meanwhile, John Molloy, ever keen on technology and music, has nudged the UK charts with his appropriately named band, Mainframe, alongside Murray Munro. "Johnnie was a great connector of people," remembers Phil. "I had told him I wanted to be a journalist, and he said, 'Leave it with me.'"



» [Amiga] Dodging hippies in the abbey segment

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THE PAWN (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: AMIGA, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 1985

THE GUILD OF THIEVES
PLATFORM: AMIGA, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 1987

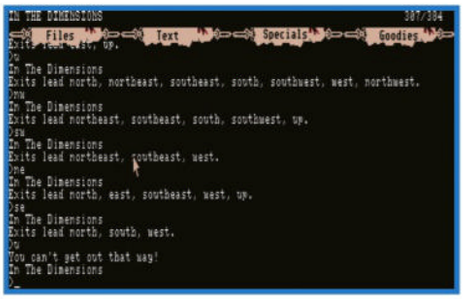
JINXTER
PLATFORM: AMIGA, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 1987

■ Today, Phil South is busy working on *Fish 2* while still writing for publications such as Fusion Retro Books' reboot of *Crash* magazine.

■ A publicity shot for Mainframe, John Molloy's band with Murray Munro. John (left) developed much of its sound on an Apple II and Greengate DS3 Sampler.

» [Amiga] Off to a fishy disco with Bertie Bream on Hydropolis.

» [Amiga] Acquiring this gargoyle is a fiendish early puzzle.



» [Amiga] The obligatory maze. A three-dimensional one, no less.

Shortly thereafter, John introduced his friend to Kevin Cox, an editor at Dennis Publishing, who was soon to take over the reins at the newly launched *Your Sinclair*.

John Molloy had another skill that was to come in useful, as Phil recalls. "If Johnnie was interested in something or someone, he would get on the phone." In the days before automated phone systems and email, it was markedly easier to cold call companies and speak to someone important. "He was interested in Magnetic Scrolls, so he just called them up and said, 'Can I come in and have a word?' And they were so surprised that anyone would call them that they said yes." Backed by a keen interest in interactive fiction and his skills with synthesised music, John offered his experience and services to the developer at no cost. "He worked himself into the company, and he did that time after time with different companies and people. He was on his way there to do some debugging, on *Jinxter* I think, when we had THE conversation on the bus." THE conversation? "Yes, THE conversation," repeats Phil, as if he's patiently talking to a small child.

As a fan of *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* (which inspired the name of the band he was in when he met Phil), John liked absurd, offbeat sci-fi humour. "We were on the bus, joking about coming up with the silliest or most unlikely start to an adventure game," recalls Phil. "I'm pretty sure it was my idea, but it could have been his. And that was that you're a goldfish, no arms, no legs, in a goldfish bowl. How the hell would you get out of that? Anyway, we were up and running." A short time later, the pair were at Magnetic Scrolls, explaining their idea to its bosses, Anita Sinclair, Ken Gordon and Hugh Steers. But Phil only remembers one of them. "These two lovely men are in the room with Anita, and Anita, being a girl, and me being a 20-something boy, obviously, my heart, my consciousness is, is lifting all the time, testosterone being what it is. But she was also an incredibly forceful personality, engaging and not to say, a little scary because of how smart ▶

> "IT WAS PART OF MY CHARMED LIFE: I MADE FRIENDS WITH SOMEONE WHO'S GOT ALMOST EVERY ARCADE MACHINE IN THEIR GARAGE!"
>
> **PHIL SOUTH**

FURTHER FISHING: THE ONGOING TALE OF FISH

RETRO GAMER THROWS OUT THE NET AND CATCHES UP WITH STRAND GAMES' HUGH STEERS

■ Almost 40 years since its heyday, there's much still going on at Magnetic Scrolls, now in the hands of Strand Games, formed in 2016 by Stefan Meier and original cofounder, Hugh Steers. "Phil South is working with us again on the sequel, *Fish 2*," says Hugh, while concepts for *The Guild Of Thieves 2* and a *Jinxter* sequel, called *Jannedor*, are also in the works. Continues Hugh, "We're also planning to rerelease the remasters, as we have a new and shiny system with all sorts of cool features." With *Fish* (and *Corruption*) ready to launch soon, Strand has also been busy developing web versions of all its games. "Of course, all the remasters support 'classic' mode," adds Hugh. "People will be able to play all the games for free, with all the newly remastered graphics and sounds." Exciting times for fans of *Fish* and all of Magnetic Scrolls' games. To keep abreast of events, head to strandgames.com

OFFICE
Files
Text
Specials
Goodies
Block
Plush Lounge
Lounge areas in recording studios are usually for one purpose only, and that's
to lull musicians into a false sense of the value of time. They'll sit in the
comfortable sofa, drinking coffee and watching promo videos on the television
here, all the while running up huge bills at the standard hourly rate. But
they can afford it. Through a glass door to the north is an office. The only
other exits are east and west.
A waste bin is standing in the corner.
Open glass door
The glass door is now open.
In
Office
This is where the studio paperwork is done. It's also where the producer often
complains bitterly that he does everything. In fact, he spends most of his
time 'delegating responsibility' or, in ordinary language, bossing people
about. The glass door leads back to the lounge.
There is a desk and a filing cabinet here.

» [Amiga] Delegation = bossing people around.

CONVERSION CAPERS

RETRO GAMER'S GUIDE TO FISH ACROSS THE DIMENSIONS. OR RATHER, THE DIFFERENT COMPUTERS IT CAME OUT ON

GOLDFISH BOWL 0/2
Scrolls Ltd.
Someone's coming. Good, it must be time for food. SPLATTO. A hand as big as a bus drops something hard right on your head. Understandably dazed, you flip over and, through a swirl of ant eggs, spot what hit you: a tacky plastic castle. It looks like a rush job. Sir Playfair must be in trouble. And you thought you were on vacation...
Goldfish Bowl
Swimming upside down is good fun, but difficult, even for someone as highly trained as yourself. It looks like the pondweed is dangling from the gravel above your head. And the ant eggs, wow! Upside down they look, so much like, well, like exactly the same as if you were the right way up actually. Anyway, there's no need to get carried away. Sir Playfair has a message for you in the castle if you're not mistaken and he hates agents who are late.
>swim
You swim around a bit.

ZX SPECTRUM

■ Released on 128K +3 disk only, Spectrum *Fish* lacks the graphics of the other versions. Everything else is present, however, including a bespoke font, jokes, puns, puzzles and more. "Can I have that fiver now, Snouty?" asked *Your Sinclair*'s adventure expert Mike Gerrard at the end of his glowing nine-out-of-ten review. Hmm…

Playfair has a message for you in the castle if you're not mistaken and he hates agents who are late.
>retro gamer is brilliant

C64

■ Quite how the C64 version could manage graphics while the 128K Spectrum couldn't is a bit beyond us, though it had slow loading times as a result. Despite reservations about the £19.99 price tag, the joy of *Fish* lies in its story anyway, and you can disable the graphics to focus on the jokes and mayhem.

PLUSH LOUNGE 10/7
Files Text Specials Goodies
The producer's voice booms from the distance, "Rod! What are you doing? I need a tape changing." "Coming," shouts Rod. "I'd better go," he says, rushing out, "it's best not to upset him."

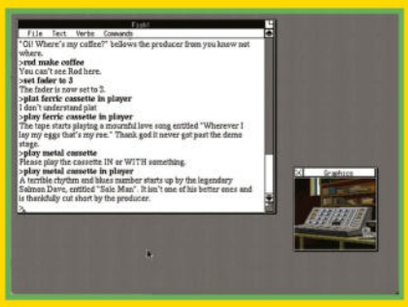
AMIGA

■ Whether you play the updated Magnetic Windows version, complete with a fresh GUI, or the classic adventure game, *Fish* is a marvellous experience on the Amiga, with its sleek graphics and the refined Magnetic Scrolls parser. There's also an aquatic John Molloy title screen ditty.

BAILING OUT

HOW MAGNETIC WINDOWS USHERED IN THE END OF MAGNETIC SCROLLS

■ Released in 1990 by Virgin Games, Magnetic Scrolls' *Wonderland* used a brand-new cross-platform engine called Magnetic Windows. It was a powerful tool: users could resize its individual windows, it had a map that drew as you progressed, plus visual cues such as an interactive compass, and a separate window for the player's inventory. The system revolutionised the way adventure games were played, but ultimately became a bridge between old-school text adventures and the increasingly popular point-and-click genre. The *Magnetic Scrolls Collection* (1991) refreshed some of its existing games (including *Fish*) to the new engine, but the tide had turned. Magnetic Scrolls had made the wrong call in persisting with text-heavy games. Consumers no longer wanted to laboriously type in commands. It was all about pointing and clicking, and after an ill-fated dalliance with RPGs, Magnetic Scrolls was gone.



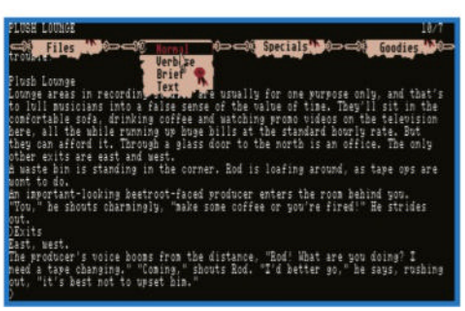
she was. So, it was quite a daunting meeting, but a peak experience. But I dare say Ken and Hugh were lovely too!" Magnetic Scrolls loved the idea, and *Fish* was go.

John and Phil got to work designing their game, with assistance from Paul Kemp, an acquaintance of John's, brought in as a sounding board and to help with the game's design. Continues Phil, "It all happened quite organically – we'd meet up, talk about it, with it being Johnnie's idea to make it some kind of transwarp technology where you're warping into the consciousness of different beings. [The Commodore 64 game] *Paradroid* was around at the time, and we may have got the idea from that."

> "PARADROID WAS AROUND AT THE TIME, AND WE MAY HAVE GOT THE IDEA FROM THAT"
> **PHIL SOUTH**

In *Fish* (often stylised as *Fish!*), the player does indeed begin the game trapped in a fish bowl. They can swim up, down and around the small plastic ornament that rests at the bottom of the bowl, but little else. It is the most absurd start to an adventure game, made weirder when the voice of Sir Playfair Panchax echoes in your brain. It turns out, you're actually Agent 10, currently on vacation and enjoying the pure mundanity of a piscine existence. Only, the Seven Deadly Fins, a terrorist, erm, shoal, are back, and causing trouble, and only the Department Of International Espionage's top spy can foil them. Unfortunately, he's busy, so it's down to you. First, Agent 10 must recover the three pieces of a mystical wheel from three different locations, enabling them to warp across space and time. Then, it's off to the planet Hydropolis, warping into the body of a local professor to try to save the population from potential dehydration. Along the way is a set of puzzles that will test even the most experienced adventure gamer.

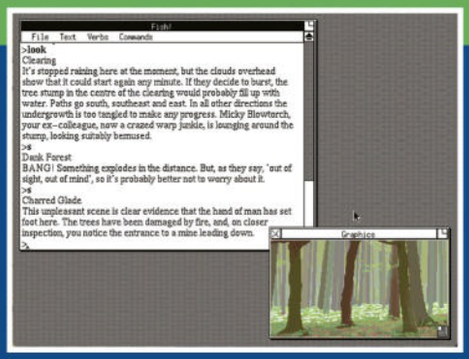
It's a suitably mad plot – but how did it get from the minds of Messrs Molloy and South to computer form? "We didn't write the game in terms of what we could and couldn't do [with the parser], because we didn't know what you could or couldn't do!" grins Phil. "I would write down a lot of things, and some of it wouldn't be physically possible, or wouldn't help the flow of the story." And some of it, presumably, made it into the game. "Adventure games have to be multiple choice, which becomes a decision tree, whereas I can only work in narrative. So, all I can do is have a flow and


PLUSH LOUNGE 10/7
Files Text Specials Goodies
Normal
Verbose
Brief
Text
Plush Lounge
Lounge areas in recording studios are usually for one purpose only, and that's to lull musicians into a false sense of the value of time. They'll sit in the comfortable sofa, drinking coffee and watching promo videos on the television here, all the while running up huge bills at the standard hourly rate. But they can afford it. Through a glass door to the north is an office. The only other exits are east and west.
A waste bin is standing in the corner. Rod is loafing around, as tape ops are wont to do.
An important-looking beetroot-faced producer enters the room behind you.
"You," he shouts charmingly, "make some coffee or you're fired!" He strides out.
>Exits
East, west.
The producer's voice booms from the distance, "Rod! What are you doing? I need a tape changing." "Coming," shouts Rod. "I'd better go," he says, rushing out, "it's best not to upset him."

» [Amiga] The player can use these drop down menus to tailor *Fish* to their liking.

PLUSH LOUNGE 10/4
Files Text Specials Goodies
A waste bin is standing in the corner. Rod is loafing around, as tape ops are wont to do.
An important-looking beetroot-faced producer enters the room behind you.
[More]

» [Amiga] With his experience in the industry, much of the record company studio segment was inspired by John Molloy.



PC

■ As with the Amiga and Atari ST games, the PC version of *Fish* got a Magnetic Windows update, an apt transformation that may have raised some eyebrows at Microsoft HQ. Both games are still fantastic, but the windowed version is probably the one best enjoyed today.

ACORN ARCHIMEDES

■ With its original release disappearing without a trace, the Magnetic Scrolls Collection was the only real way to play *Fish* on the Archimedes. It's another enjoyable, if tough game for adventure fans, and John Molloy's distinctly odd watery tune remains.

ATARI ST

■ As with the PC, Archimedes, and Amiga games, the Atari ST received an updated version of *Fish* in 1991 through the *Magnetic Scrolls Collection*. Despite some reported minor bugs in its design, it's a fine-looking game, and arguably Magnetic Scrolls' best alongside *The Guild Of Thieves*.

an inkling about where the possibilities for interaction are. Luckily, Johnnie understood it very well, and we had Rob Steggles [*The Pawn*] help us towards the end." With Magnetic Scrolls otherwise giving John and Phil free rein, they'd write down their story, adjusting it for the format. "Then, he'd go up to Magnetic Scrolls and type it all into this big humming fridge."

> "A LOT OF OUR PUZZLES WERE EITHER WILDLY IMPOSSIBLE OR TOO SIMPLISTIC"
> **PHIL SOUTH**

None of Magnetic Scrolls' adventures are what you'd call easy. Yet *Fish*, thanks to its bizarre premise, took things even further, with the player often resorting to trial-and-error, and under a time (or move) limit, too. "Balancing puzzles is very tricky," says Phil, without an ounce of remorse for those frustrated Eighties gamers. "And that's really what Rob came in for. A lot of our puzzles were either wildly impossible or too simplistic. In its original form, it would have been unplayable, except by us. It was meant to be an absurdist sci-fi, but it gradually got watered down, though we still managed a few in-jokes." The merciless fish puns are relentless too, from underground stations such as Paddlington, to the Fishofax and your damp flexible friend, the Fisa card.

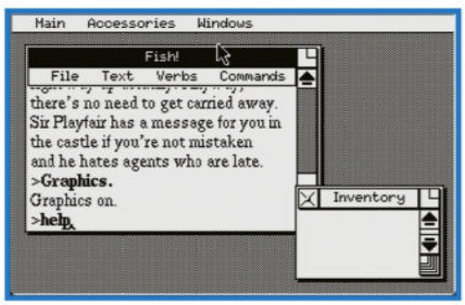
With *Fish* given a glossy Rainbird release, the Magnetic Scrolls game appeared in late-1988, to high critical praise, including a Golden Joystick Award for Adventure Game Of The Year. Did it spur Phil to venture further into the genre? "Yeah, but it didn't amount to anything because, as I previously noted, my ability to write narrative in decision trees was severely impaired by the fact I couldn't do it," he laughs. Coupled with John Molloy moving to America to pursue another of his projects, it was to be the pair's first and only game.

Sadly, the downward turn in Telecomsoft's fortunes led to its sale, and *Fish*, despite the praise, was lost in the maelstrom of Rainbird's demise. "Everybody loved it. They loved the humour, the writing, the art and the whole fishiness of it all. And we won a Golden Joystick – so, we must have done something right." ✱

Our thanks to Phil South for his time, and to the number one resource for retro interactive fiction, classicadventurer.co.uk
This article is dedicated to the memory of John Molloy, who passed away in 2018.

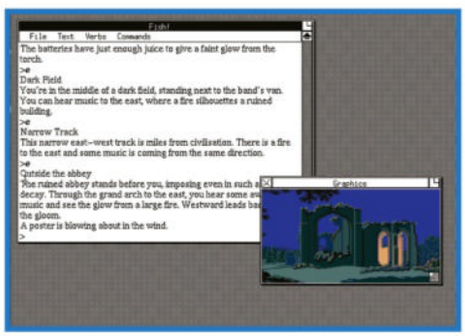
» [Amiga] A gold disc, a crucible, asbestos gloves and… an exploding parrot? All part of this bonkers conundrum.

» [Amiga] It's reassuring to know the underground is just as packed on Hydropolis.



» [Atari ST] Magnetic Scrolls' updated version of *Fish* allowed for multiple windows.

» [C64] Preparing to enter the watery castle and begin the adventure.



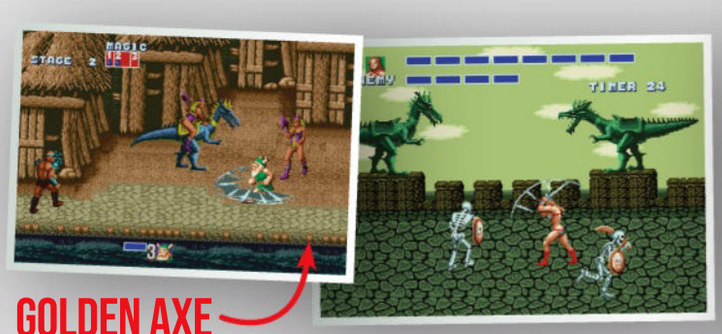
» [PC] Outside the spooky abbey – hippies just out of sight.

retro GAMER's FAVOURITE...

MEGA DRIVE ARCADE CONVERSIONS

SEGA'S 16-BIT CONSOLE NOT ONLY OFFERED ARCADE CONVERSIONS THAT FELT ON PAR WITH THE ORIGINAL ARCADE EXPERIENCE, BUT SOMETIMES EVEN OFFERED SIGNIFICANT EXTRAS. IF YOU'RE ABLE TO ADD THE FOLLOWING TEN GAMES TO YOUR COLLECTION YOU WON'T BE DISAPPOINTED

Words by Darran Jones



GOLDEN AXE

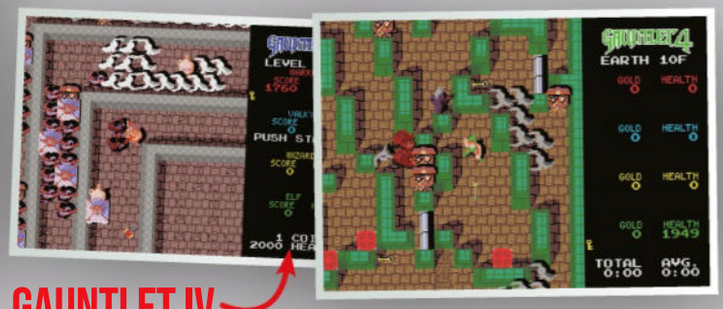
■ Sega's in-house conversion was a triumph and absolutely trounced the other home versions of the time. It not only closely mimics the arcade original, but even includes a new ending, a Duel mode (right image) and a brand-new final level that sees you taking on the mighty Death Bringer, who absolutely isn't just a reskinned variant of the mighty Death Adder.

SLAP FIGHT

■ This is effectively two great games in one. The main game is a slapping adaptation of the arcade original (which was admittedly seven years old at the time). There's also a hidden game called *Slap Fight MD* (shown here) found in the options which adds enhanced visuals, rejigged levels and stages and a great new score by Yuzo Koshiro. Just be mindful that it's now very expensive on the second-hand market.

STRIDER

■ Developed in-house by Sega R&D6, *Strider* remains one of the best arcade conversions on the system. While it lacks any extras of any sort, it does deliver an exceptionally accurate recreation of Capcom's bonkers arcade game. There are certainly better home versions of the game today, but the Mega Drive version still holds up beautifully.

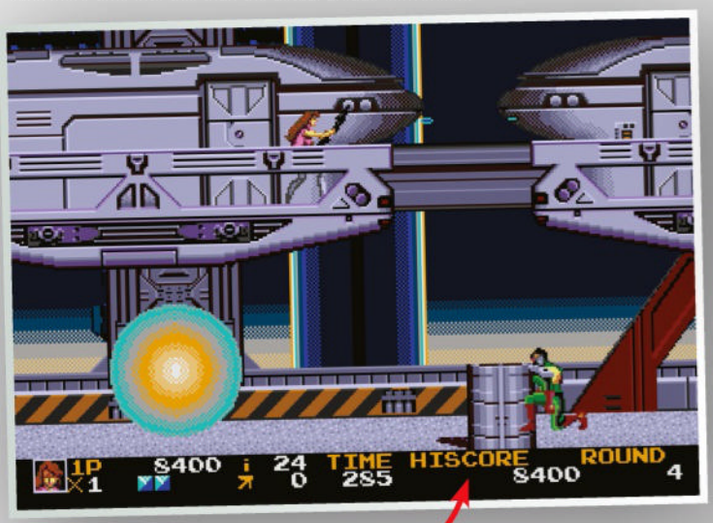


GAUNTLET IV

■ M2's first game remains an excellent romp. In addition to being a virtually arcade perfect representation of the original arcade smash, it also includes the brilliant Quest Mode (right image) that gives the game an RPG-style slant and has you battling your way through a series of elemental-themed towers. It also makes rather tremendous use of Sega's 4-Player Adaptor.

MERCS

■ While Sega CS1's adaptation of Capcom's arcade hit criminally doesn't include the multiplayer action of the original game, it still makes our list. The reason for this is its excellent Original mode (left image) which sees you switching between new characters as you rescue them and lets you upgrade weapons and items by visiting shops. We've sunk more time into this than the actual arcade conversion.



ROLLING THUNDER 2

■ Namco's home adaptation of its coin-op sequel offers substantially more. The visuals and audio have been obviously downgraded, but the game now features extra levels, new bosses and enemies and a pretty useful password system allowing you to jump to any stage. It also includes the arcade game's excellent multiplayer mode, making it an absolute blast to play with a friend.

SUPER HANG-ON

■ This is another good example of Sega going beyond just a typical arcade conversion. Original mode (left image) is a great feature letting you race against progressively tougher opponents. You'll be rewarded for your efforts, but will also have to juggle maintaining and upgrading your bike. Sega's *Super Monaco GP* offers a similar experience if you prefer racing on four wheels.

KLAX

■ Two versions of this sublime puzzler exist on Sega's console. The original Japanese conversion by Namco (right image) includes a rather spiffy competitive verses mode which adds significantly to the game's longevity. While the Western release doesn't feature this, it does enjoy a slew of tweakable options. The original is the best, but both remain exceptional examples of the genre.

SUPER STREET FIGHTER II

■ Both of Capcom's *Street Fighter II* conversions make for good purchases, but *Super Street Fighter II* is our pick here. You'll need a six-button pad to get the most out of it, but you'll find a staggering amount of content included with the game, including four new brawlers, which isn't surprising when you consider it was squeezed onto a 40MB cartridge. While not quite as nice to look at as the SNES version, it still plays great.

NBA JAM

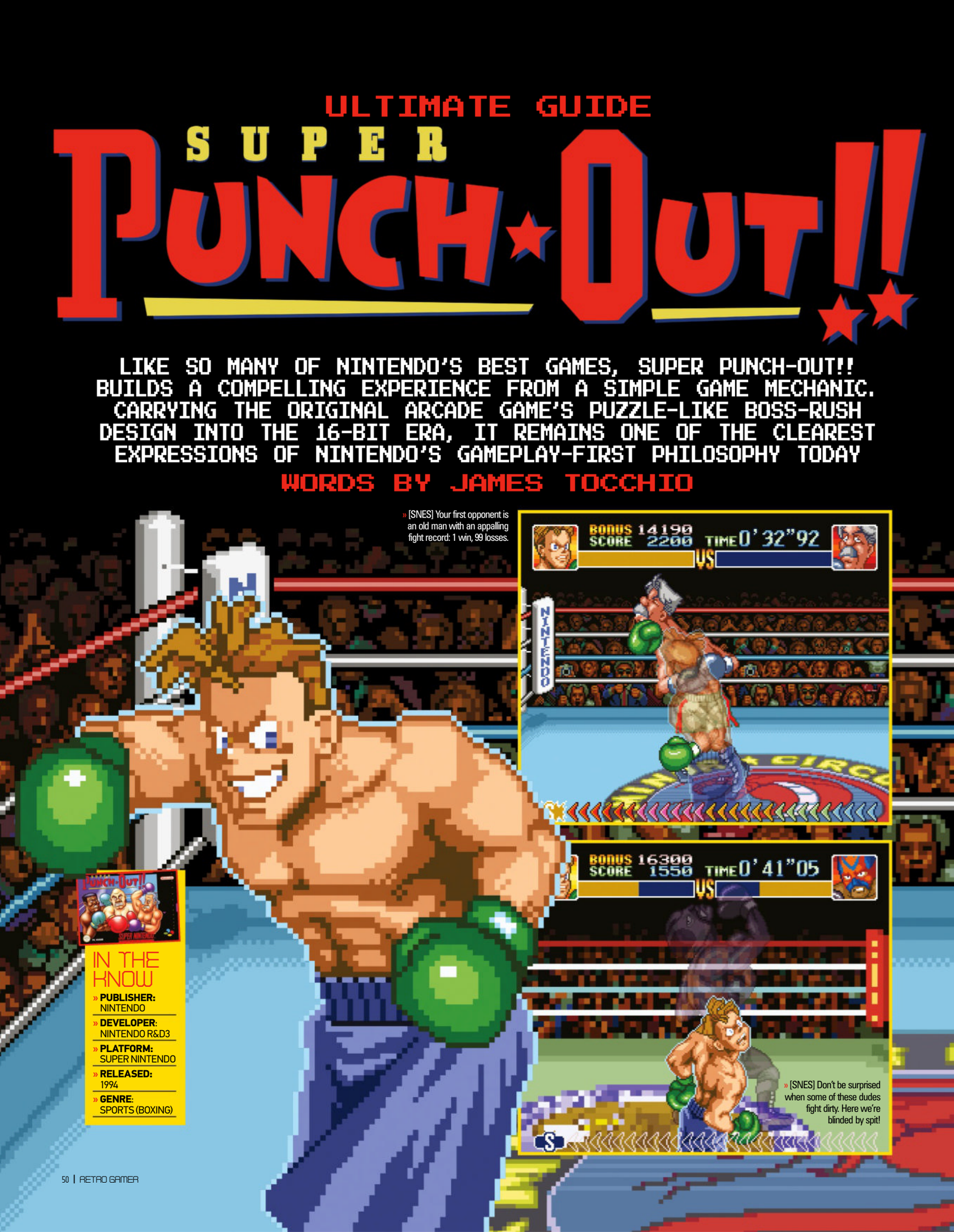
■ Although the Mega-CD version boasts an updated roster and better aesthetics, the faster loading times of the Mega Drive original makes for a more enjoyable playing experience. This is a truly wonderful adaptation of the arcade hit, catering for up to four players and featuring a host of gameplay modes and extra teams to discover. *NBA Jam: Tournament Edition* is also worth seeking out for Sega's console.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

SUPER PUNCH-OUT!!

LIKE SO MANY OF NINTENDO'S BEST GAMES, SUPER PUNCH-OUT!! BUILDS A COMPELLING EXPERIENCE FROM A SIMPLE GAME MECHANIC. CARRYING THE ORIGINAL ARCADE GAME'S PUZZLE-LIKE BOSS-RUSH DESIGN INTO THE 16-BIT ERA, IT REMAINS ONE OF THE CLEAREST EXPRESSIONS OF NINTENDO'S GAMEPLAY-FIRST PHILOSOPHY TODAY

WORDS BY JAMES TOCCHIO



» [SNES] Your first opponent is an old man with an appalling fight record: 1 win, 99 losses.

» [SNES] Don't be surprised when some of these dudes fight dirty. Here we're blinded by spit!

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO

» **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO R&D3

» **PLATFORM:** SUPER NINTENDO

» **RELEASED:** 1994

» **GENRE:** SPORTS (BOXING)

By the time you reach Narcis Prince, the vain German boxer who opens *Super Punch-Out!!*'s Special Circuit, you know the drill. You've slugged your way undefeated through three World Circuits, thwarted the dirty tricks of the Masked Muscle, put Mr Sandman to sleep, and made an Italian clown cry. And while Narcis Prince and the Special Circuit will take every drop of skill and intelligence you've got, the game remains the same.

Your first hint at how to win comes before you've even entered the ring, because *Super Punch-Out!!* may look like a boxing game, but it's not. Not really. "I will not let you touch my beautiful, beautiful face," Narcis preens before the fight. At that moment you've solved the riddle: this guy's gotta get punched in the nose.

Midway through the match, you've donked his pretty mug one too many times. He's seeing red, which makes him more dangerous but also more vulnerable. You dodge his wild punches and counter with a Super to the jaw. A couple more and the handsome prince is kissing the mat. You've solved another puzzle in Nintendo's least puzzle-like puzzle game.

Because in *Super Punch-Out!!*, every opponent is a boss fight, every match a test of observational skill and problem-solving. Your timing must be precise, sure, and in that way it's a sports game. But with just two attacks and nowhere to run, this isn't so much a sports title as it is a rhythm puzzler wearing boxing gloves.

This puzzle pedigree is perhaps not so surprising when you understand where the game came from. The *Punch-Out!!* series was not born from a desire to make a great boxing game. It came about because Nintendo had too many televisions stored in its Uji plant. The backstory is told in an 'Iwata Asks' interview published on Nintendo's website in 2009.

"SUPER PUNCH-OUT!! CAME ABOUT BECAUSE NINTENDO HAD TOO MANY TELEVISIONS STORED IN THEIR UJI PLANT"

Following the success of the *Donkey Kong* arcade cabinet, Nintendo misjudged demand and ordered too many televisions. Someone went to Genyo Takeda, who had created Nintendo's first videogame, a horse-racing game called *EVR Race*, and who was then heading the arcade hardware division at Nintendo. Using new techniques that could make images bigger with zoom functions, Takeda and Shigeru Miyamoto experimented with creating a racing game using two monitors side by side. But the hardware was only powerful enough to enlarge one image at a time, so Takeda thought, "If we can only use one image, how about making it a person?" Then and there the theme became boxing. (Incidentally, the second television was still used, just placed atop the main screen

» [SNES] When you down an opponent, mash buttons to increase your stamina until they rise again.

» [SNES] Each opponent has a pre-match title card, many of which offer handy hints at how to beat them.

THE CONTENDERS

FROM ARCADE EXPERIMENT TO NINTENDO LEGEND

The original arcade *Punch-Out!!* was developed by Nintendo's Integrated Research & Development Division, a group primarily responsible for designing arcade cabinets, consoles, and handheld hardware that occasionally created software, too. The division was led by Genyo Takeda, one of Nintendo's earliest employees, whom Shigeru Miyamoto and Satoru Iwata once described as "Nintendo's first game designer."

In the early Eighties, Nintendo's *Donkey Kong* arcade cabinet sold so well that the company overestimated demand and ordered too many television monitors. Looking for a way to use the excess inventory, Miyamoto and Takeda conceived an arcade cabinet with two screens. After a meandering route involving new sprite-scaling effects, a horse-racing game, and plenty of concepts limited by contemporary hardware, the team finally settled on a boxing game. Although they eventually realised two screens were not strictly necessary, they kept the design. Koji Kondo, who would later compose music for the *Mario* and *Zelda* series, created the game's music and sound effects as his first Nintendo project.

» This Japanese sales brochure for the original arcade release of *Punch-Out!!* shows the dual-screen cabinet.

Punch-Out!! debuted in 1984 and became an immediate success worldwide, ranking among the best-selling arcade games of the Eighties in the United States. It was followed by an arcade sequel, *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* for NES in 1987, *Super Punch-Out!!* for SNES in 1994, and a Wii reboot in 2009.

and used to display the fighter data, allowing the game's massive character sprites to occupy the entire bottom screen.)

Coming as it did from Nintendo's arcade division, *Punch-Out!!,* like all successful arcade games, had a certain immediacy. It needed to attract players in a busy arcade, communicate its rules and mechanics in seconds, and convince players to feed another coin into the machine as often as possible. For these reasons, *Punch-Out!!,* became a refined concept, a simplified puzzle game in which each fighter telegraphed their attacks through exaggerated animations. Each had exploitable weaknesses, and success depended more on observation and memorisation than anything else. Players learned patterns, recognised tells, and waited for opportunities to strike, while the boxing theme was more decoration around a series of puzzle-like encounters. When the series made the leap from the 8-bit NES to the 16-bit SNES, Nintendo wasn't interested in dramatically expanding or evolving *Super Punch Out!!,* as it had so often done with its tent pole titles. *Super Punch-Out!!* instead focussed on refining the fundamental core of *Punch-Out!!,* you'd step into the ring, study your opponent, identify their weaknesses and exploit them before they knocked you out.

What mostly changed was how clearly, deeply, and dramatically the new hardware could communicate those boss-based puzzles. Compared with previous *Punch-Out!!*s, most notably *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* for the NES, the SNES version had larger sprites, more expressive characters, better animation, and a level of personality that the series had never before achieved.

Bear Hugger is enormous, his big belly is (shall we say) well insulated. You throw a body blow, and he simply laughs it off. Dragon Chan's martial arts background informs his unusual acrobatic attack patterns. Masked Muscle fights dirty because that's who he is under the mask, a classic wrestling heel. Narcis Prince becomes vulnerable when his deep-rooted vanity gets the better of him. In each case, and in every other fight not mentioned, character design and mechanics are inseparable.

This is where *Super Punch-Out!!* feels delightfully Nintendo-esque. Rather than inundate the player with lengthy tutorials, ten different punches, menus, items, or complicated commands, *Super Punch-Out!!* gives you two fists and says, "Have fun." The game trusts players to observe their enemies' taunts, their expressions, their subtle movements, their posture, even their culture. These things communicate more

"IT'S LIKE A KNOCK-KNOCK JOKE, EXCEPT INSTEAD OF SAYING, "WHO'S THERE?" YOU SIMPLY PUNCH THE KNOCKER IN THE NOSE"

GABBY JAY

A French boxer beyond his prime, he's slow, weak and ready for retirement with a stunning record of 1 win and 99 losses.

How To Beat Them: The easiest fight in the game requires nothing special. Dodge his predictable punches, counter right away, and throw in the occasional Super Punch for practice.

BEAR HUGGER

This massive Canadian lumberjack's strength comes from his size. He's slow, but enormously durable and uses a devastating bear-hug attack.

How To Beat Them: Focus on headshots, since body blows are totally ineffective. Dodge his overhead smash, counter quickly and unleash Super Punches whenever you can.

PISTON HURRICANE

This Cuban fighter uses speed, combination punches and relies on quick flurries rather than overwhelming size, strength, or defence.

How To Beat Them: Watch for his rushing combinations and dodge carefully. Counter after openings, then use Super Punches to the gut to inflict the most damage.

BALD BULL

The Turkish powerhouse returns from previous *Punch-Out!!* games, and as the Minor Circuit champ, he's as dangerous as ever.

How To Beat Them: Dodge his heavy hooks and charges (which truthfully aren't as strong as in previous games). Perfect counters and Super Punches will quickly send him reeling.

PLAY IT TODAY

WHERE TO SPAR WITH THIS PERENNIAL CONTENDER

Super Punch-Out!! has appeared on several game systems since its original release in 1994. In 2005 it was included as an unlockable bonus game in the GameCube release of Electronic Arts' *Fight Night Round 2*. In 2009 it was released for the Wii's Virtual Console service and then brought to the Nintendo 3DS Virtual Console in 2016.

For many gamers, the most convenient way to play *Super Punch-Out!!* today is through the Nintendo Classics library on Switch and Switch 2, where it was released in 2019. Granted, you'll need to be subscribed to Nintendo's Switch Online service to play it there, but the benefits outweigh the cost. It runs beautifully, offers save states, and in addition to the normal base game, the Switch Classics Library also includes a Special version of *Super Punch-Out!!* in which the game's normally locked Special Circuit is available right from the first bell.

NINTENDO ON THE ROPES

WHEN EA BROUGHT SUPER PUNCH-OUT!! TO THE GAMECUBE

Back in the GameCube days, Electronic Arts was cranking out sports titles on a nearly monthly basis. On PlayStation and Xbox, its games sold in droves, while GameCube's releases saw comparatively less success. To help cultivate a GameCube mainstream audience, Nintendo came up with a plan. It granted EA (and Activision) reduced GameCube licensing costs. In addition, Nintendo allowed EA to use some of its characters in a selection of sports titles on its home system. This partnership saw Mario and friends appearing in games like *SSX On Tour* and *NBA Street V3*.

Another result of this partnership was that Little Mac, of *Punch-Out!!* fame would appear in EA's *Fight Night: Round 2* on the GameCube. Furthermore, a complete emulated reproduction of *Super Punch-Out!!* was available right from *Fight Night 2*'s main menu. The emulated *Punch-Out!!* is visually decent, but suffers from occasional slowdown, and today it's probably one of the worst ways to play the game.

BOB CHARLIE

The Jamaican boxer who seems more interested in dancing than throwing punches. He's energetic, athletic and difficult to hit.

How To Beat Them: When the fancy footwork stops, focus on body shots. When he begins his 'shuck and jive' be sure to dodge the spinning uppercut and counter.

DRAGON CHAN

A martial arts champ from Hong Kong, Dragon Chan uses unconventional (illegal?) kicks, making him extremely dangerous and unpredictable.

How To Beat Them: Dodge and focus on face punches. When he leaps, dodge away from three kicks. If he starts to meditate and heal, hit him in the gut.

MASKED MUSCLE

A mysterious luchador from Mexico who combines heavy punches with wrestling-inspired dirty tricks like head-butting and spitting in your eyes.

How To Beat Them: When his corner coach yells to, "Spit in his eye," you won't be able to throw punches or see very well. Avoid this with a dodge.

MR SANDMAN

This elite American contender is renowned for his incredible power and durability. Aggressive combinations and quickness make him a major challenge.

How To Beat Them: Basic punches don't damage him too badly, so combine face punches with body super blows. When he shuffles his feet, get ready to dodge his uppercuts.

EAT LIGHTNING, CRAP THUNDER!

TIPS AND TRICKS FROM THE COACH'S CORNER

THE DARK SOULS OF...

■ Success in *Super Punch-Out!!* comes down to pattern recognition. Every boxer telegraphs their attacks and memorising these animations will be the key to winning every bout. Practice observing head and shoulder movements and stances to anticipate attacks and create reliable counterpunch opportunities.

FLOAT LIKE A BUTTERFLY

■ Aggressive attacking often leads to mistakes against tougher opponents. Patience while prioritising dodging and blocking until you understand an opponent's rhythm is key to taking fewer hits and preserving your health. Once you know their pattern, you can focus on chipping away at their energy.

STING LIKE A BEE

■ Super Punches can quickly move a match in your favour. Stay nimble and chain together combinations without getting hit and your meter will gradually fill. Once it's full, wait for (or create) an opening and follow up with a big Super Punch. Use them often!

TIMING ABOVE ALL

■ Button mashing rarely succeeds against advanced opponents. Focus instead on precise timing and deliberate punches. Well-timed counters are stronger, safer and more effective than reckless attacks. Developing rhythm and consistency will improve performance throughout every circuit of the game.

ARAN RYAN

■ An unpredictable Irish fighter, he relies on dirty tactics, awkward timing, and deceptive attacks to frustrate inexperienced players.

How To Beat Them: Watch for the clinch. He grabs you and drains your health. There's also a combo where you must block high and low six times, followed by an uppercut.

HEIKE KAGERO

■ A Japanese ballet dancer turned boxer, Kagero brings incredible speed and impeccable timing to the ring. His long, silver hair is also dangerous.

How To Beat Them: Not the most resilient fighter, so Super Punches to the face do big damage. When he does the Mirage Dance, hold up and mash Y to disrupt him.

MAD CLOWN

■ A circus-themed boxer with erratic behaviour, deceptive acrobatics and brutally powerful punches. His constant movement makes him difficult to predict.

How To Beat Them: Ignore his antics and focus on hitting his face. Ducking works great here, too, and if he starts juggling, be ready to dodge projectile balls.

SUPER MACHOMAN

■ This arrogant bodybuilder was the boss of the first game. His fast combinations and spinning attacks punish careless mistakes, so pay attention.

How To Beat Them: Memorise his exercise programs. Program A requires four blocked upper punches. Program B requires three blocked low punches. Program C is the most dangerous: dodge three uppercuts.

in a split second than an instruction manual can in two pages.

The result is a game in which every match feels like a little self-contained mechanical riddle. Learning the solution is satisfying and executing it is visceral. It's like a knock-knock joke, except instead of saying, "Who's there?" you simply punch the knocker in the nose. *Super Punch-Out!!* improved on its predecessors in more ways than one. It simplifies complicated systems from the previous game, such as the Super Punch Star System, and expands the strategic elements that made the original games so replayable.

Players can attack with jabs to the face or with body shots. Opponents can block punches, so players will need to also attack from the right direction. There's a power meter, which allows you to throw knockout punches, and a secondary power meter indicated by the colour of the frame surrounding the player's character portrait. When this turns red, your punches increase in speed and power.

There's also a stun mechanic that has no on-screen indicator. If you land consecutive punches, it's possible for your opponent to enter a 'dizzied' state for a few moments. A well-timed knockout punch at this moment will instantly knock the bad guy down. *Super Punch-Out!!* also adds a Time Trial mode, battery back-up for saving the player's name and game, and a great soundtrack of memorable themes (though it's arguably not as strong as Koji Kondo's score for the original).

In truth, it's just a great game, and another shining example of Nintendo's game design-first ethos. Contemporary critics felt so, too. In the USA, *Game Informer* magazine rated *Super Punch-Out!!* 8.75 out of 10 and *GamePro* gave it an 18.5 out of 20. In 1995, the UK-based *Total! Magazine* ranked it 27th in its list of the Top 100 SNES Games while in 1997, *EGM* ranked it as the 56th best console game of all time.

From the very first arcade release of the original *Punch-Out!!*, to the Super Nintendo sequel, and even beyond, to the Wii reboot, the *Punch-Out!!*, series has constantly demonstrated a philosophy Nintendo has followed for decades: make a compelling interaction and then build a game around it. The 16-bit *Super Punch-Out!!* is a boxing game that succeeds precisely because it isn't really a boxing game. It's a boss rush, a puzzle game, and a lesson in elegant game design delivered one punch at a time. ✱

"THE 16-BIT SUPER PUNCH-OUT!! IS A BOXING GAME THAT SUCCEEDS PRECISELY BECAUSE IT ISN'T REALLY A BOXING GAME"

NARCIS PRINCE

This vain German boxer is the first contender in the Special Circuit, opened by finishing the first three circuits with a 4-0 record.

How To Beat Them: He's obsessed with his looks, so punch him in the face. This makes him mad, which makes him reckless. Dodge his punches and Super Punch his face.

HOY QUARLOW

An elderly Chinese master wielding a staff and using highly unorthodox techniques, he's one of the trickiest fighters in the game.

How To Beat Them: Hold up to block his stick attacks, then follow with a body blow. Alternate left and right punches or they won't land. Dodge away when he leaps.

RICK BRUISER

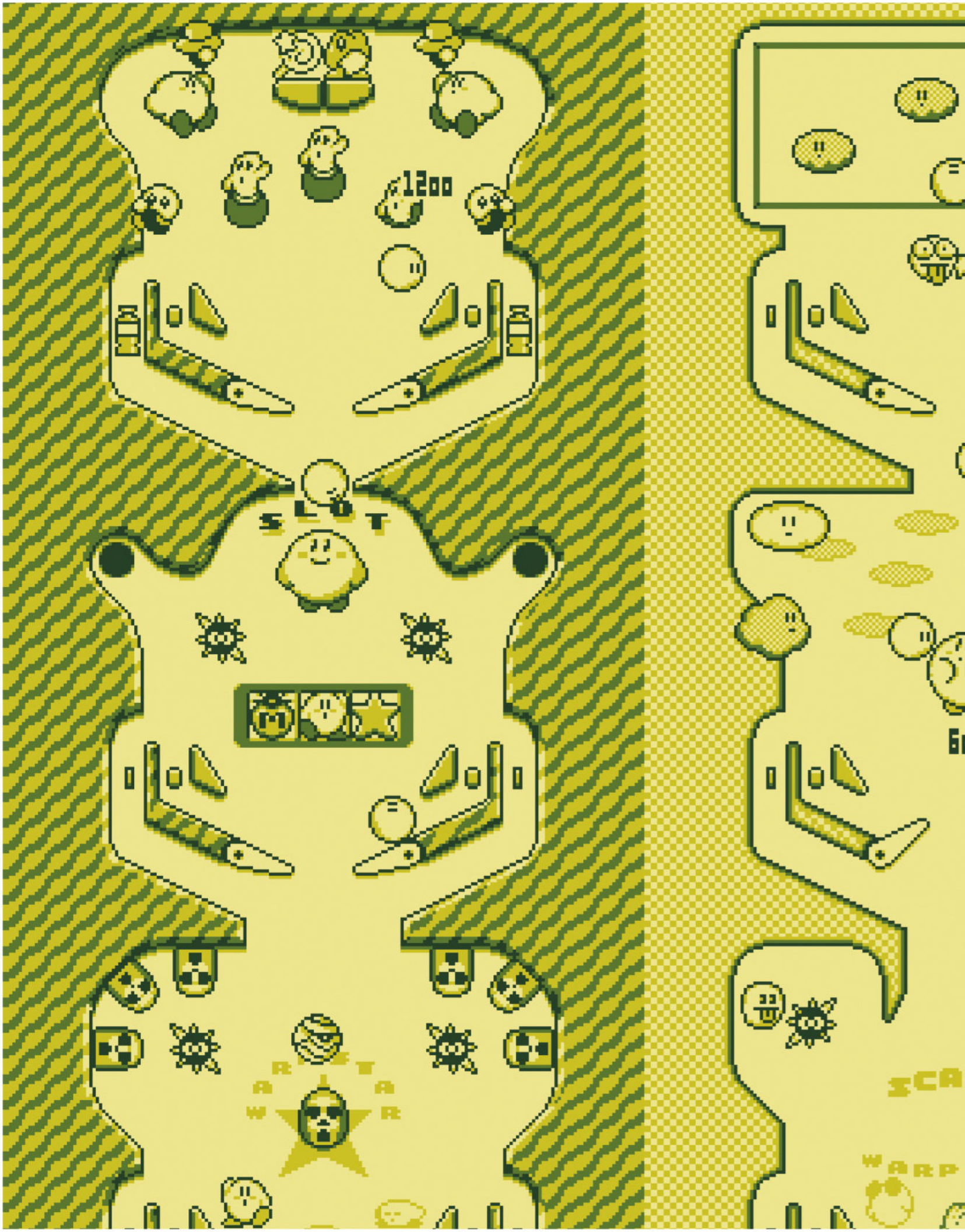
The elder of two Bruiser brothers possessing exceptional speed, skill, and ring IQ. This one is a real challenge.

How To Beat Them: Hit Rick with a super and he'll immediately counter. Hold up to block it. When he hops twice, he'll drop a devastating elbow. Dodge left or else.

NICK BRUISER

The final champ of the game, and the strongest opponent yet, Nick has nearly flawless offence, defence and speed.

How To Beat Them: Watch for him to stop moving, then dodge. If he attacks low, punch low, if he attacks high, go high. Alternate punches left and right or you'll miss.


1200
SLOT
WARP

Kirby's Pinball Land

KIRBY'S A KEEPER

RETROREVIVAL

» GAME BOY » 1993 » HAL LABORATORY

Around 1996 I decided I wanted to buy a second Game Boy, so I could play classic link-up titles like *Tetris* and *Tennis* with friends. By this time I think the Game Boy Pocket had been announced, so you could get some really good deals on the OG Game Boy. But alas, I was a skint student. The best deal I could find on the high street was from Dixons, which was offering a bundle featuring two games – *Kirby's Dream Land* and *Kirby's Pinball Land* – for something like £50. I had zero interest in the bundled games, but I bought it regardless with a cunning plan to sell them on sharpish to help cover the cost of the console. But then something happened. Kirby happened.

Kirby's Dream Land was fine. I loved *Super Mario Land* and this was a nice companion title. It was fun and easy to beat; a good little game. But *Kirby's Pinball Land* was a different proposition. I was never a fan of computer pinball games. I'd played some of the Digital Illusions ones on the Amiga and I know they're held in high regard, but I just couldn't see the appeal. For me they were similar to fruit machine simulators – a bit pointless.

Kirby's Pinball Land though. What a game this was. It was pinball, but there was so much going on across the game's three tables, including the various puzzles and minigames that propelled Kirby upwards to where the higher point bonuses were waiting. There was also stuff hidden away, outside of the tables, like the boss battles that culminated in a showdown with chief baddie King Dedede. Accessing and beating the bosses supercharged your points tally and the end result was a score-attack classic (your high scores were saved when you powered off, which motivated me to keep striving to score more). Clearly, *Kirby's Pinball Land* was not for sale. And I still have that original cart in my collection. I'll occasionally dig it out and play it for far too long. ✱

THE MAKING OF MARATHON

TODAY, BUNGIE'S NAME IS SYNONYMOUS WITH FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS. IT DIDN'T BEGIN WITH HALO OR DESTINY HOWEVER, BUT RATHER AN ICONIC SERIES OF MAC GAMES THAT DEBUTED IN 1994. THIS IS THE STORY BEHIND THE FIRST MARATHON GAME BY THE PEOPLE THAT MADE IT

WORDS BY JEREMY PEEL

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** BUNGIE
- **DEVELOPER:** BUNGIE
- **PLATFORM:** MACINTOSH
- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **GENRE:** FPS

Bungie knew that *Marathon* was going to be a big deal. That became obvious when somebody stole it. Company cofounder Alex Seropian had taken a beta of the 1994 shooter to a retail convention, in order to create buzz among buyers and bump up preorders. "I think it was the full game," says former Bungie PR director Doug Zartman. "Definitely unfinished." The beta lived on a single computer, which Alex locked in a closet when it wasn't being used for demonstrations. "Someone broke into the closet," Doug says. "Took the machine, got the beta off it, and released it onto the internet."

Such was the intense impatience of Mac gamers desperate to get their hands on the sci-fi FPS – which became a stepping stone to *Halo*, and eventually inspired the *Marathon* reboot three decades later.

The origins of the series were far humbler, however – rooted in the college dorm that programmer Alain Roy shared with Jason Jones at the University of Chicago. "I remember meeting Jason and showing off that I knew a little bit of Apple IIe machine language," Alain says. "Because he was smarter than me and knew more than me."

It was there that Jason would encounter *Wolfenstein 3D*, and be inspired to create *Pathways Into Darkness* – Bungie's nascent first-person shooter, about a Special Forces soldier fighting through a pyramid to prevent the rise of a destructive god. "Jason reached out to me and said, 'Hey Alain, I implemented some copy protection for *Pathways*. Can you crack it, just to see if it's any good?'"

Alain admits, with a laugh, that he had no skills in that area. "But he made a small mistake that made it really easy to crack. So I cracked the protection, and he made it stronger."

Later, just as Alain was about to graduate in 1994, Jason asked if he wanted to come and work with Bungie for the summer. "Back in those days, I don't think we used the word startup, we didn't use the word internship," Alain says. "I was just hanging out with a buddy from college, helping him with the game."

Every morning, Jason would pick up Alain from the university and drive him to Pilsen, the largely Hispanic neighbourhood of Chicago where Bungie had its office. "There was a Mexican place right across the street

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

MYTH: THE FALLEN LORDS

PLATFORM: PC, MAC, LINUX

RELEASED: 1997

HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED (PICTURED)

PLATFORM: XBOX, PC, MAC

RELEASED: 2001

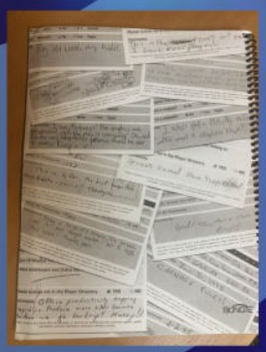
DESTINY 2

PLATFORM: PS4, VARIOUS

RELEASED: 2017

» [PC] At a certain point in the story, the AI Durandal teleports you onto an invading vessel.

THOR



» [PC] Doug shared this image with us that features a selection of the studio's and their favourite messages from fans.

"SOMEONE BROKE INTO THE CLOSET, TOOK THE MACHINE, GOT THE BETA OFF IT, AND RELEASED IT ONTO THE INTERNET"

DOUG ZARTMAN

where we'd go get the best gorditas for lunch," Alain says.

Bungie's next project, *Marathon*, was a more ambitious FPS – developed in parallel with id Software's own revolution in 3D gaming. "*Pathways Into Darkness* is orthogonal, all the walls are at right angles to each other," Alain says. "And Jason became aware of *Doom*, and the fact that it had more flexible geometry."

***Marathon* would be set on a colony ship under invasion from an alien species**. It was a setting that would allow the team to take full advantage of 3D space, sending the player spinning up spiral staircases and around the curved corridors of a Pfhor battle cruiser.

Luckily for Bungie, Jason was capable of matching the genius of id Software's John Carmack. "Jason was honestly one of the smartest people I've ever met," Alain says. "He was responsible for all of the hard things in the game, absolutely, including the graphics." Jason was completely self-taught. "I have no idea where he got his technical chops, or how he learned how to make high framerate 3D spaces," Doug says. "He really was involved in every part of the process. He was making the engine, he was making levels, he was writing the story. He always had a very high-level view of the totality of the game and where it was not sufficient."

At some point in the middle of 1994, Bungie ran into an issue with its graphics engine, and Jason sat in the park with his notebook, working through the math problems by hand. "Then I remember him going in and spending two or three days of intense activity, just rewriting the whole graphics engine from scratch," Alain says. "He was that special sauce."

Marathon became one of the first videogames to incorporate mouselook. "Which *Doom* didn't have," says Doug. "We were constantly compared to *Doom*, and *Doom* for the Mac was, although not our tagline, how we were commonly known. But *Doom* didn't have up and down. In *Doom*, if there was a guy on a ledge, you just turned ▶

» [PC] 30 years after its original release, *Marathon* debuted on Steam, which is the version we've used to illustrate this feature.

ALAIN ROY

Alain was the programmer of *Marathon* and its two popular sequels. He's currently a senior software engineering manager at IonQ.

DOUG ZARTMAN

Doug joined Bungie in 1994 as a PR manager and worked on many of the studio's games. He's now working at The Fourth Curtain as a community manager.

MULTI-MARATHON

20-ODD YEARS OF BUNGIE SEQUELS

Bungie followed up *Marathon* with two direct sequels in the Nineties. *Marathon 2: Durandal* was named after the mercurial AI who had both helped and hindered you in the first game, and was set primarily on the S'pht planet of Lh'owon (bless you). Improving tech meant Bungie could widen the player's view, and the immersion factor was further enhanced by new atmospheric effects – including ambient sound like wind and alarms. Since the sequel took place mostly outside, its levels were larger and easier to traverse. Not to mention more brightly coloured.

Work began on *Marathon Infinity* just a few months later, but already the FPS landscape was fundamentally changing. *Quake* was the talk of the town, and since *Marathon*'s original programmers had moved onto Bungie's next project, there was little scope to significantly alter the way the series played. *Infinity*'s standout feature was a single new gun. But it did boast a surreal, dimension-hopping plot, and a journey that branched a little depending on player decisions. It also leaned heavily on levels that demanded you keep your oxygen meter topped up, which gave it a distinct character. Mac gamers lapped it up.

Bungie's modern-day *Marathon* reboot retained *Infinity*'s sense of hard-won survival, but otherwise belongs to a different sort of FPS subgenre entirely: the extraction shooter. Players compete on the surface of Tau Ceti IV, in the shadow of the UESC *Marathon*, to scavenge loot from a failed colony. On the one hand, this is a stealth game – one that demands you learn the soundscape of the hostile planet around you if you're to have a chance of reading a dangerous situation correctly. On the other, it's a team shooter in which you're rewarded for close coordination and the combined use of cooldown abilities. Trigger the Assassin's smoke bomb at the same time as the Recon's detection radar and you've won yourself a meaningful advantage in a fight.

Despite all the change, the reboot is surprisingly faithful to the spirit of the original trilogy's story. Bungie's tagline for the new game, "Escape will make me god,' is a direct quote from Durandal himself, rooted in 1994. *Marathon* players are still, after all these years, being shunted around at the whim of corporate AIs. Some fans have even speculated the new game takes place in one of *Infinity*'s failed dimensions. A chilling thought.

» [PC] Weapon terminology has remained consistent; the Zeus RG is a popular railgun in modern *Marathon*.

» [PC] Looting is the aim of the game in the *Marathon* reboot, but leaves you vulnerable.

» [PC] Often the challenge isn't figuring out where to go, but how to get there.

▶ toward him and you shot, and somehow it magically got up to the ledge. So there was a lot of real technical innovation that was happening in *Marathon*."

***Marathon* diverged from *Doom* again in its writing, which is credited to Greg Kirkpatrick and Colin Brent.** Where id Software valued a simple premise and let shotguns do the talking, Bungie told an evolving tale over the course of *Marathon*. By interacting with terminals, the player discovered the existential struggle between the AI entities that controlled the ship's systems. Few can forget Durandal, the 'rampant' digital personality who kidnaps your nameless security officer, and fills your head with snatches of Darwin and medieaval poetry.

"What always struck me about *Marathon* compared to *Doom* is there was a lot more depth of storyline," Alain says. "I remember hanging out with Jason, he loved the *Epic Of Gilgamesh*, which is 3,000 years old. His thinking was influenced by a lot of the reading he did. He brought that introspection to the game."

Jason had switched to classics at the University Of Chicago. "He had actually

» [PC] Stations like these can variously charge up your health, your shields and your oxygen tank.

» [PC] The most numerous of your foes, the Pfhor, are colour-coded according to their deadliness.

» [PC] Using levers to line up these platforms for climbing is a particularly tricky task.

» [PC] A typically labyrinthine level layout, involving plenty of backtracking and barking up the wrong tree.

started in computer science," Doug says, "and dropped it right away when he realised they didn't have anything to teach him."

Of course, there was a little less introspection in the multiplayer. *Marathon* was Bungie's first game to incorporate network play, and the team was quickly swept up in the frenetic chaos of deathmatch.

> "JASON JONES WAS HONESTLY ONE OF THE SMARTEST PEOPLE I'VE EVER MET. HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL OF THE HARD THINGS IN THE GAME, ABSOLUTELY, INCLUDING THE GRAPHICS"
>
> ALAIN ROY

"Once things were basically playable, the way each day would work was that people would code hard, do some art, for the first 12 hours of the day," Alain says. "And the last two hours, if you had a good clean build, was just people intensely playing the game. Maybe we only had one or two levels, but we were drinking our own champagne."

Jason was particularly invested in the outcome of each match. "He loved playing competitive games against everyone else in the office," Doug says. "And he loved dominating – in a friendly way, but very, very competitive." Doug, who had previously written lawyerly press releases for the American Bar Foundation, was the odd man out – leaving work at five or six o'clock in the evening. "None of the rest of them did," he says. "They went home to sleep, but they ate most of their meals in the office, cross-legged on the carpet, and worked all the time. There was a whole lot of playtesting, probably more than was strictly necessary, just because network games were a ton of fun."

Alain may have been a recently graduated programmer with little experience of sensible working hours, but even he discovered his limits working for Bungie. "And after a while I was like, 'You know, Jason, I actually can't handle this. I can't do twelve to fourteen hours, seven days a week. So I stepped back, and I just did six days a week. But they were happy to pull all-nighters whenever it was needed."

With the team so busy, it was only Doug who had time to record the voices of the BOBs – the civilians Born On Board the UESC Marathon during its long journey from Earth. "All the devs were working their tails off, nose to the grindstone making the game," he says. "And I could be pulled into Alex's office to scream into the microphone with my voice cracking."

In September of 1994, Bungie boasted that *Marathon* could reach up to 30 frames per second on the Power Macintosh, "after which an internal limiter cuts in to prevent disorientation". Alain, though, recalls the fight for every frame during development – and the triumph of discovering a wasteful chunk of code in the game, which was responsible for raising and lowering platforms in the levels. "We were doing something really stupid," he says. "And by optimising the elevator updates, we got an extra frame per second for the demo."

The demo proved very popular. "We took that to conventions," Doug says. "And had people play four-person and eight-

person games." It only became apparent that fans were vibrating with excitement, however, when one resorted to theft.

The beta heist seemed like a disaster to Bungie at the time. The software was incomplete, and the team had no idea what kind of issues might have been lurking in its code. They would never have dreamed of intentionally unleashing a dodgy build on the home computers of their fans. "But people loved it," Doug says. "People went crazy for it, and were sharing it in all sorts of places. They would be writing to us, 'Why are you keeping this to yourselves? Why aren't you just releasing the beta?'"

Doug wrote a letter, explaining to the Mac gaming community that Bungie wanted to hold off on an official release until *Marathon* was ready for public consumption. "It's a good thing that nothing bad came of the beta, that there weren't terrible bugs in it that turned people off the game," he says. "But that did help. Every taste that we gave people of the game generated a lot of excitement and a lot more anticipation for the final thing."

Preorders were in the thousands, and when *Marathon* came out, everything exploded, as Doug puts it. "It was really stunning," he says. "The spike of sales and activity, and people we needed in the office. It was a real sea change."

A month after launch, Bungie was at the Macworld Expo in San Francisco, selling the game to punters in person. "We were at the booth just grabbing handfuls of *Marathon* and handing them over," Doug says. "People would give us $40 cash, and we just decided to figure out the tax later, because that would be too time-consuming." Doug would walk back to his hotel in the evening with $600 stuffed into his pockets. "The rate of selling was just nuts," he says. "It was a very heady experience."

The panicked yells of the BOBs became a signature part of the game,

> "WE WERE CONSTANTLY COMPARED TO DOOM, AND DOOM FOR THE MAC WAS, ALTHOUGH NOT OUR TAGLINE, HOW WE WERE COMMONLY KNOWN. BUT DOOM DIDN'T HAVE UP AND DOWN"
>
> DOUG ZARTMAN

and Doug became a minor celebrity at conventions, asked to scream 'They're everywhere!' for an audience of fans. He wonders now whether Bungie would have gone on to greater mainstream success with *Halo* and Destiny, had it not been on the Mac scene first.

"Being Mac only, *Marathon* was the big fish, the big shooter," he says. "And we won tons of awards and got huge sales." The downside was that the Mac market was a small pond – and the game was shut off from PC players who might have loved a story-driven spin on the FPS formula.

"But I think that was probably very good for Bungie, to get some big successes and learn how to be a game company that was responsive to its community," Doug says. "I do sometimes wonder, if we were going up against *Duke Nukem* and *Doom* and the other big shooters, whether *Marathon* would have had the impact that it did."

Bungie stuck with Apple for two *Marathon* sequels, and half a decade

» [PC] Do not trust this man. He's liable to explode if you step too close.

» [PC] So, there's the exit. Just don't expect a clue as to how to get there.

COMBAT EVOLUTION

FOUR WAYS MARATHON INFLUENCED THE HALO

RADAR TRACKING

■ Performance restrictions meant that *Marathon* had plenty of screen real estate to spare, and Bungie filled it partly with a motion tracker. It allows you to anticipate encroaching enemies, or panic when the red markers stack up. *Halo*'s UI has an identical feature.

BUGS ABOUND

■ Among your foes in *Marathon* is a malevolent grub that sits passively on the floor until disturbed – at which point it floats to your position, and explodes in a burst of gore. In *Halo*, too, the dormant threat of the story is a kamikaze insect.

POWERFUL PISTOLS

■ Perhaps the most entertaining gun in *Marathon* is the Fusion Pistol. Hold down the secondary fire button and your character's hands will shake violently as it charges to max power. It lives on in *Halo*'s charging Plasma Pistol, which remains popular to this day.

» [PC] Much of *Marathon* is dark and moody, but alien ship design provides splashes of colour.

» [PC] Terminals like these offer instruction, taunts from Durandal, and a way to exit the level.

» [PC] During the course of the alien attack, humans aboard the UESC Marathon are enslaved.

on, Steve Jobs announced during the Macworld Expo that *Halo* would be released simultaneously on macOS and Windows. In the event, of course, *Halo* came to the Xbox first. And Doug says that Mac exclusivity was never part of Bungie's long-term plan. "Jason and Alex wanted everyone to play our games."

The studio went on to achieve mainstream success, ultimately becoming a household name for gamers across a wide array of platforms. Even today, however, Alain still runs into fans from the Mac days. "There are a lot of people like, 'Oh my God, that game changed how I thought about games, I loved playing it when I was a kid.' So I think it did make a real impact, especially in the world of Macintosh gamers. Because there was nothing else like it on the Mac at the time."

Neither Alain nor Doug have heard from Jason in many years, but he remains at the heart of Bungie – overseeing the studio as it rolls out its live service reimagining of *Marathon* and plots new stories for the fate of the BOBs. There were plans to record Doug once again for the reboot, but those fell by the wayside during the game's long development. "I'm still waiting for my call," he laughs. "But not holding my breath."

COMPETITIVE EDGE

WHO WERE MARATHON'S PEERS IN THE NASCENT FPS LANDSCAPE?

id Software's seminal first-person shooter *Doom* followed in the footsteps of *Wolfenstein 3D* by prioritising performance over complexity, establishing the lightning fast pace of the genre as we know it today. Where *Wolfenstein* had 90-degree walls and flat levels, *Doom*'s buildings were angular and demanded vertical movement.

In fact, the game incorporated staircases, gantries and elevators that transported the player between different floors of a map. These advances in level design were used to push forward id's tricky navigation puzzles, a feature that *Marathon* would emulate.

Another notable competitor to *Marathon* was *System Shock*, which came from a slightly different design lineage to many of its competitors. While it played out in a first-person perspective, its creators were committed to granular simulation – the idea that items could be picked up and dropped, and that the player character would be subject to realistic physics. Its developer, Looking Glass, would go on to establish the field of immersive sims, which would eventually produce *Deus Ex* and *Dishonored*.

As a result of its focus on complexity, *System Shock* couldn't match the likes of *Doom* for performance. But it engrossed players with a nuanced plot that was told indirectly through found data and diaries, which led to today's popular audiologs.

» [PC] In its *System Shock* remake, Nightdive Studios stuck closely to the original level design.

GAMES

OFFWORLD WONDERS

Marathon began Bungie's grand tradition of high-concept space stations. The UESC *Marathon* is itself a marvel, built within the natural confines of Deimos, a moon borrowed from Mars. Bungie topped it with *Halo*'s Installation 04, a ginormous ring world that somehow supports life.

» [Nintendo Switch] The right mix of ingredients is needed to score high audience ratings.

WRESTLING EMPIRE

PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING AS A VIDEOGAME GENRE IS AS RICH AND AS OUTRAGEOUS AS ITS SOURCE MATERIAL. THIS N64-INSPIRED OFFERING ENCAPSULATES THE CREATIVE ELEMENTS OF THIS UNIQUE SPORTS SUBGENRE, AND A SOLE DEVELOPER SITS BEHIND THE DESK OF THIS WRESTLING EMPIRE

WORDS BY JAHANZEB KHAN

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** MDICKIE
» **DEVELOPER:** MDICKIE
» **RELEASE:** 2021
» **PLATFORM:** ANDROID, IOS, PC, SWITCH
» **GENRE:** SPORTS

Mat Dickie is the sole developer/publisher behind *Wrestling Empire*… and a playable character in the game, too!

If anyone were to describe professional wrestling to the uninitiated today; the whole thing does indeed sound like a real-life videogame. Independent developer and designer Mat Dickie, who solely developed *Wrestling Empire* as 'MDickie', immediately saw the limitless potential of wrestling videogames. "I've always been fascinated with the physics of wrestling – like playing *Tetris* with the human body! We can see the different shapes of the body and how those can be contorted for the sake of entertainment."

Wrestling Empire is the ultimate wrestling sandbox where players experience the intersection of the athletic and commercial dimensions of wrestling. It captures the culture behind the performance sport and the cutthroat business aspects of it, too; allowing players to take on the role of both wrestling performer and wrestling promoter – backstage politics shaping the mayhem inside the ring. The game has it all: tables, ladders, chairs, and contract negotiations. It's a battle over world titles and profitable territories. As a wrestler players can build a championship legacy, and as a promoter players can quite literally build a global wrestling empire.

When Mat was first experimenting with game-development tools, his earliest demos were wrestling themed, and the core gameplay fundamentals of *Wrestling Empire* can be found in his non-wrestling projects like *Hard Time III* and *Infinite Lives*. "I'll make a wrestling-based combat system and then all kinds of other concepts can drive that engine as far as they need to," we're told. Wrestling provides the canvas and all the tools needed to get creative with combat and action sequences, which Mat was able to leverage off to expand his own repertoire as a designer. "Wrestling is underrated as a genre because there's a lot happening under the surface: a lot of synchronised animations, scenery interactions, character customisation, and convincing AI," Mat says. "That's a good curriculum for any aspiring developer."

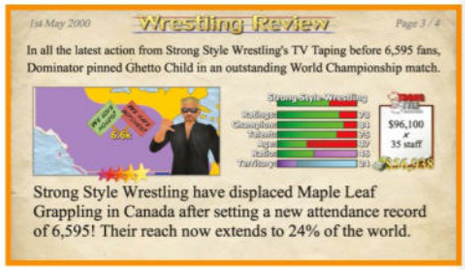
> "AS A WRESTLER PLAYERS CAN BUILD A CHAMPIONSHIP LEGACY, AND AS A PROMOTER PLAYERS CAN QUITE LITERALLY BUILD A GLOBAL WRESTLING EMPIRE"

Wrestling Empire is an homage to the Nintendo 64 era of wrestling

» [Nintendo Switch] *Wrestling Empire* offers a creator suite for inventing your own grapplers.

» [PC] Match types include the infamous Exploding Barbed-Wire Deathmatch.

» [Nintendo Switch] The game allows multi-person battles for fun couch multiplayer.


1st May 2000
Wrestling Review
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In all the latest action from Strong Style Wrestling's TV Taping before 6,595 fans, Dominator pinned Ghetto Child in an outstanding World Championship match.
$96,100
35 staff
Strong Style Wrestling have displaced Maple Leaf Grappling in Canada after setting a new attendance record of 6,595! Their reach now extends to 24% of the world.

» [PC] Weekly news reports provide insights on all the happenings in Career mode.

games, which to many is also the golden age of the genre in terms of balanced gameplay and creative longevity. The most influential being none other than *WWF No Mercy*.

These titles also provide valuable insights for game developers. Mat himself admires the thoughtful design choices that were made to work within the confines of the tech and data limitations. He feels it shows respect for the consumer, a mindset that continues to guide him as a developer even in an age of digital distribution and enormous file sizes. "Those N64 cartridges were the last time developers had to make compromises, so it's clear how important that was to fine-tuning the vision and getting priorities straight," Mat says. "It taught developers to be resourceful and creative, so it's no coincidence that those muscles have atrophied since games became more realistic. I deliberately put myself back in that mindset when I started developing mobile apps. I always imagined I was squeezing them onto a cartridge, which served me well when millions of people felt a smaller game was worth downloading and installing. Even now, I wince when my games creep above 256MB and I think twice about installing games that weigh gigabytes."

Mat's respect for his audience has also guided his choices from a business standpoint, with no additional cost being passed on to the consumer. Mat's games have often quadrupled in size post launch, with no extra costs to pay. *Wrestling Empire* first launched in January of 2021, and the launch game is like a demo compared to what it has become today after years of free updates, with more still to come. "I'm personally proud that *Wrestling Empire* was able to deliver over 75 free updates – some of which were as consequential as adding whole other game modes," Mat says.

The game initially launched with the wrestling career mode, before expanding to add the booking mode where players manage their wrestling business. Later, free-roam sandbox exploration was incorporated, while new wrestling holds were also added.

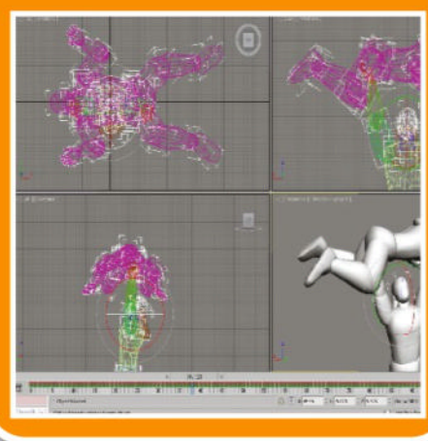
Reflecting on his journey as a game developer, Mat is aware that his games likely stick out like a sore thumb compared to the more premium wrestling experiences. "I make no apologies for delivering the 'fast food' of gaming that comes thick and fast at a fair price. It's the only weapon we have left to fight back against heavyweight [wrestling] games that cost hundreds of dollars. Those will always exist for elitists who want visual fidelity, but only the lightweight champion can show you moves you've never seen before."

EMPIRE EVOLUTION

How independent wrestling games have evolved

The genesis of *Wrestling Empire* can be traced all the way to the 2004 release of *Wrestling MPire*, with the seminal title providing the core foundation that evolved over the years into its current incarnation. Mat built each of these games from the ground up using whichever tools of trade were available. "I got my start coding in languages like BASIC and PASCAL, which are very linear like one gigantic stream of code. It took me a long time to come around to the 'object orientated' programming that I now do in C# with Unity. Even in the middle, when I was coding in Javascript for Flash, I clung to my BASIC background."

Charting the evolution of his flagship 3D wrestling IP, Mat fondly reflects on the journey. "I was actually amazed that *Wrestling MPire 2004* and *Wrestling Encore 2006* looked almost identical – even though I did remake all of the character models and animations again from scratch! I did that one more time in 2008 before accepting it was a waste of time and energy to reinvent the wheel for each project."



THE MAKING OF COLONY WARS

PSYGNOSIS WAS ONE OF THE MOST PROLIFIC STUDIOS ON SONY'S FIRST CONSOLE, TURNING ITS ATTENTION TO ALL SORTS OF GAMES AND GENRES, OFTEN WITH GREAT SUCCESS. ONE OF ITS MOST MEMORABLE IS AS INTERESTING AS IT IS AMBITIOUS AND WAS INSPIRED BY ONE OF THE ALL-TIME GREATS, ELITE

WORDS BY JOSH WISE

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** PSYGNOSIS
- **DEVELOPER:** PSYGNOSIS
- **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION
- **RELEASED:** 1997
- **GENRE:** SPACE COMBAT SIMULATION

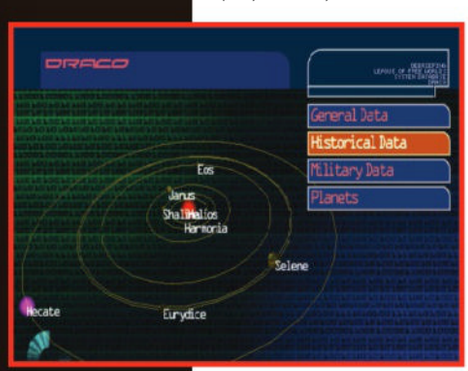
In *Colony Wars*, space is less a final frontier, as it was yearningly dubbed in *Star Trek*. It is instead the inevitable dumping ground into which humans have spilled. In the future, exhausting all resources, man has swelled outwards in his appetite, busted free of Earth's gravity, and now gropes hungrily at distant planets. The game was released in 1997, a time when the ozone layer's worsening hole was fretted over, when Tony Blair had just taken office as Prime Minister of the UK, and when the PlayStation was on its ascent, right past the ozone and into the stratosphere.

Though some of these historical markers age *Colony Wars*, along with the muddy wobble of its polygons, in other respects it has orbited back into relevance. Not only are we grimly destined for Mars in the real world, but we're also curiously lacking in straight space combat simulations in our games. True, *Starfield* tried its hand, and there were robust dogfight segments in *Star Wars Outlaws*, but play *Colony Wars* now and you're reminded of a time when space still held potential. A time when a developer – in this case the Liverpool-based Psygnosis – could provide a focussed slab of ship combat, wrap a story around it, and grab an audience. In fairness, the grabbing had more to do with the world built around the adventure: not just a quick layer of missions and motives but an entire cosmos of mood, history, and lore.

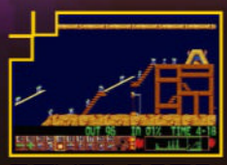
> "EVERYBODY HAD A CREATIVE THOUGHT, AND ANY ONE SPARK OF AN IDEA WOULD LEAD TO US GOING OFF AND CREATING SOMETHING"
> CHRIS ROBERTS

The one in charge of the wrapping was Damon Fairclough, a young writer who joined Psygnosis in 1995. Damon wrote the backstory for *WipEout* and its sequels (an ironist's dream of future-shocked corporate cynicism), and he found himself, in 1997, in a position of some confidence. "*WipEout 2097* had just come out and *Destruction Derby 2*," he says, "so the company is still riding super-high." Damon's job was chaotic, often being brought onto projects at later stages. *Colony Wars* was different. "It didn't really quite happen that way on anything else," he says. "You would come in too late and you would be just kind of doing bits for something that was already shaped. Whereas with *Colony Wars* we were part of the shaping."

After an initial meeting, it soon became clear just how huge the project was going to be. Damon's role was to write the history of the in-game universe. He kept a daily journal, and in an entry on 30 January 1997, he wrote, "I'm only just realising what an utterly massive undertaking it's going to be." In *Colony Wars*, the game's lore is codified in a vast menu; you're able to read about each planet



» [PlayStation] The in-game database gives you extensive information on each system and planet, all voice-acted.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

LEMMINGS (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: AMIGA, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 1991

WIPEOUT
PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION, SATURN, PC
RELEASED: 1995

KRAZY IVAN
PLATFORM: SATURN, PC, PLAYSTATION
RELEASED: 1996

■ *Colony War*'s script and in-game mythology was written by Damon Fairclough, who is now working as a freelance writer and critic.

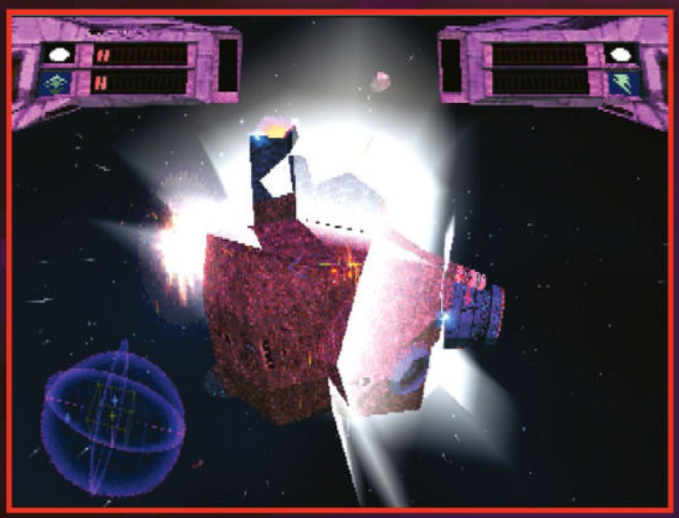
COLONY WARS

and system, about their histories and their beefs with other systems. You can imagine a document like this existing in a drawer. Giving this over to the player is both a generous and a risky move. "It's remarkable to me," says Damon, "the fact that that was done at all, because it's just in the menu system. It's not integral to the game as such that you know this stuff about the planets."

So why was it done at all?

The game's producer was Andy Satterthwaite, who was given a tall order – and tasked with knocking the order down to size. "I started at Psygnosis in '93 as a programmer," says Andy. "I started off working on boring shit, I did an installer for a flight sim, and then we were working on Sega Mega-CD games." Andy's first step up, from the boring shit to the big time, was *WipEout 2097*. "I basically begged in the interview, 'Look if I possibly can, can I get the sequel to *WipEout*,' and, funnily enough, they hadn't actually planned on doing a sequel at all," says Andy. "I guess they hadn't really twigged that [*WipEout*] was gonna blow up as much as it did."

After the massive success of *WipEout 2097*, Andy was brought onto the burgeoning *Colony Wars*. "At the time, in a separate world in Los Angeles, *Colony Wars* was being developed," says Andy. "It was in trouble, let's just say, it was in trouble." *Colony Wars* was the actual brainchild of Mike Ellis. However, the midwifery involved in getting the game out of Mike's brain was significant, and Andy, known at the studio for his creative problem-solving, was now in charge. "There was a massive, massive design document," he says. "[Mike] created it with multiple branching storylines,



» [PlayStation] Your missions often have you destroying key facilities, with huge light shows as a reward.

» [PlayStation] The Navy has a few Death Star-size superweapons that you have to battle.

■ The producer on *Colony Wars*, Andy Satterthwaite brought the game's disparate elements together. He is now chief design officer at PikPok.

■ The man responsible for the game's music, and that of the *WipEout* series, Tim Wright still composes, sometimes as CoLD SToRAGE.

■ The graphic designer on *Colony Wars*, Anthony Roberts drew in-game art, and the front cover; he is now a freelance artist.

THE OUTER COLONIES

PSYGNOSIS EXPANDS ITS GALAXY WITH TWO PLAYSTATION SEQUELS

COLONY WARS: VENGEANCE

■ The first sequel takes place a hundred years on from the events of *Colony Wars*, after the canonical ending that saw the League Of Free Worlds victorious. The same snappy combat returned, with some neat refinements, though the worldbuilding (not to mention the game's budget) wasn't as rich. The follow-ups appeared due to the first game's particular success in America. While it underperformed in the UK, the States were a different story. Speaking of which, *Vengeance* continued the trend of branching narrative, with six available endings. Damon Fairclough returned, on script duties; Tim Wright and Andy Satterthwaite did not.

COLONY WARS: RED SUN

■ The third entry (entitled *Colony Wars III: Red Sun*, in America) has you play as a civilian miner wrapped up in an alien conflict. The Red Sun of the game's title refers to a weapon, a bio-mechanical warship that harvests worlds. Think the Death Star, and you're pretty much there. By the third entry, the series had grown stagnant. *Red Sun* was made by a mostly different team. The ship combat was as fun as before, but the depth and breadth of the original had been harvested, leaving less and less of its wonder behind.

but the game they had at the time was pretty much a cube in space."

The LA studio was Sony Imagesoft, which regularly partnered with Psygnosis on games such as *Mickey Mania*. Things were not going well at the studio. "They had a schedule which had everyone doing 96-hour weeks, and it was just like, 'OK this is just not viable,'" says Andy. "I'd certainly deeply wounded Mike's baby by taking the axe to it to make it deliverable."

> "THE LAST FEW MONTHS OF THE PROJECT, YOU'RE LIKE, 'THAT'S IT, ONCE THIS IS DONE I'M GOING TO WORK IN MCDONALDS!'" ANDY SATTERTHWAITE

First priority was cutting back the design of *Colony Wars* to more of a punching weight. "We had to trim it down to about half of the branching [plotlines]," he says. After moving the team back to Liverpool, Andy got to work. For the combat and visual flare, he picked a gifted young designer named Chris Roberts [not the *Wing Commander* one – Ed]. "I insisted that I got Chris onto it," he says. The first game Chris worked on at Psygnosis was *WipEout 2097*.

"Even though it's his first role," says Andy, "the guy is a complete savant when it comes to engines and effects and everything like that." It was because of Chris that Quake, the famous weapon in *WipEout* that ripples the track like a wafted duvet, came about. "He was trying to work out how the track was running," says Andy. "He just ran a cycler through the track to see how the generation worked – we looked at it and went, 'Well that's going in!'"

Next was the storyline, and its essential flavour. Andy knew exactly who he wanted. "For me, the real lynchpin [was] the flavour," he says, " [and] we were working with a writer who I completely loved, who was at Psygnosis at the time, called Damon Fairclough." Here a contradiction arises: the need to strim *Colony Wars* into a deliverable product, and the competing need to make it a vast and rich

» [PlayStation] There is no mistaking the *Star Trek* influence in some of the craft on display.

» [PlayStation] Some of the League ship designs have a *Thunderbirds* quality to them.

backdrop, upon which dozens of mini-stories would unfurl. "To Andy's credit, he was absolutely sure he wanted all that stuff in," says Damon. "Even though it was a demand on my time and resources. It had to be voice-recorded, it had to be translated."

Andy's inspiration was an early love for *Elite*, David Braben and Ian Bell's 1984 masterwork. "*Elite* was certainly my favourite game as a kid," says Andy. "You could go and look at any of the planets and it gave you a basic one-line-generated bio about, you know 'populated by green frogs or whatever' and I really wanted to carry that vibe." The magic of *Colony Wars*, to those who know, are the little hooks stashed in these potted histories, the hints that ignite your sense of wonder and possibility. For Andy, Damon's knack for this magic was sharp early on. "For one of them, he wrote that it was famous for being the birthplace of the guy who invented the cure for old age," says Andy. "And it was suddenly like, 'Fuck! Of course, this is why the whole population has expanded. No one's dying!'"

Vital to the success of *Colony Wars*, strange to say, was not office politics, or even quite office chemistry, but office geography. "A lot of it came out bizarrely because of the layout of the office," says Andy. "Twelve desks, a sofa and a coffee table. It was almost like being in an indie studio, you weren't being constantly watched and double-checked." Those who worked at Psygnosis around that time all seem to talk about the air in the place, as though something at high frequency hummed in it. "I'm not sure it was my thing because that was the air at Psygnosis," says Andy. Damon talks about it too. His friendship with an artist named Anthony Roberts was key to the game's identity, even if the collaboration wasn't direct. "He was like two desks away, and there was a lot of back and forth with him showing me the font styles that he was

» [PlayStation] All briefings are voice-acted, giving you a real flavour of each mission before you start.

» [PlayStation] Whether in first or third-person, you're never far from a dazzling flare.

GOING BOLDLY

A LICENSED SUCCESSOR, IN A FAMILIAR PATCH OF SPACE

In 2000, the Stockton-based Warthog Games released *Star Trek: Invasion*, a kind of spiritual sibling to *Colony Wars* that wore the licensed uniform of Starfleet. You might dismiss it as a cynical clone. But two things make it worthwhile. One, the team that made it included Martin Turton (who worked on *Psybadek*, at Psygnosis) and several *Colony Wars* alumni – notably, Mike Anthony, John Gibson and Steve Davies, all of whom were programmers. And two, the game is a fun and competent space combat sim. Licensed *Star Trek* games are not unlike the Alpha Quadrant, through which Captain Picard and his crew liked to sail: occasionally smooth but more often rocky with trouble. Most fans tended to venture in with their shields up, ready for disappointment. *Invasion* was a rare bright spot, offering a lacquer of strong graphics and a voice cast pulled from *The Next Generation*. Patrick Stewart, Michael Dorn and Judi Durand (as the voice of the computer) all returned. Plus, Jenette Goldstein (who played Private Vasquez in Aliens) drifted in from the Zeta Reticuli System, James Cameron's stomping ground, to voice a suitably sassy engineer. *Invasion* is worth revisiting, for aficionados of the genre as well as well-travelled Trekkies.

» [PlayStation] The likenesses of *Star Trek* actors lend the game authenticity, along with signature spacecraft.

WELCOME TO EARTH!

AN ARCADEY SPIN FROM MICROIDS, IN A SUPERHOT FUTURE

» [PlayStation] Bands of smoggy sky and sudden shocks of blue water lend *Invasion* a thirst-sharpening palette.

■ Developed and published by Microids, *Invasion* was a Europe-only release. The premise: in 2093, Earth is invaded by aliens. Who says you need a plot ripe with revelation and novelty? The ingredients here are plain – high-speed aerial combat above the parched rind of an overheated Earth. What enlivens *Invasion* are its colour-saturated treescapes and the crackly arcade feel of its dogfights. Whereas *Colony Wars* feels highly produced, Microids gives you a slice of low-budget thrills with an almost underground quality. The term 'Eurojank' applied with love, is perfect for *Invasion*. There is a swarming difficulty to its combat, as your enemies breed like rabbits in the air and objectives clutter your beeping radar. The story is told in still images that warp and slide with animated effects. Cityscapes like New York and Los Angeles are scorched with white columns of laser; the game came out in 1999, and the presence of *Independence Day*, released in cinemas three years earlier, is thick in its imagery. *Invasion* seems almost to have been wiped from memory, as if it happened in some alternate timeline, but it's a vital reminder of the sheer single-genre breadth available on the PlayStation back then.

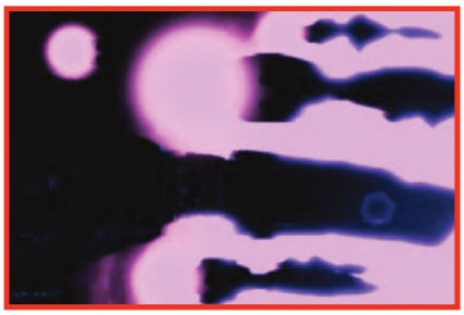
» [PlayStation] The backdrops often feature wormholes and swirls of light, with a stark visual power..

coming up with," says Damon. "So I was just, it was in the air."

Chris Roberts joined Psygnosis in 1995. He worked on *WipEout* and its sequel. Along with other things, he designed the cover art for 2097, but it was The Designers Republic that turned in the final product. "I came up with a concept," says Chris, "and they carried it through in their style." By his own admission, he was a presiding ghost over both projects. "I was kind of just in the background for *WipEout*." But that's the thing about Psygnosis then; being in the background was just as important. "It didn't matter which area they were from," says Chris. "Everybody had a creative thought, and any one spark of an idea would lead to us going off and creating something. I think we did work collaboratively, but it might not have seemed like it at the time."

Chris' work took inspiration from history. On sketching out the logos of each of the factions, he drew from World War II. On the Empire, the fascistic force with half the galaxy in its choke hold, "It's kind of a deconstructed sickle and hammer," says Chris, "reconstructed to look like a letterform, but it was to indicate something very staid, very empire. For the League Of Free Worlds, "The flying angel-type figure was this idea of freedom and escape." He also lists *2000 AD* as an inspiration growing up. The brutalist blocks of Mega-City One, from *Judge Dredd*, are a visual touchstone for the glimpses we get of Earth in *Colony Wars*, and for Damon it was the darker side of sci-fi that struck his eye. "I've soaked in a bit more *Blade Runner* than *Star Wars*," Damon says. "But the number one sci-fi thing that I enjoyed in my life would be *Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*."

> "I WAS ALWAYS A MELODY PERSON. WE'RE GOING BACK TO JOHN WILLIAMS AGAIN, BUT HE'S KING OF THE FRICKING MELODY"
> TIM WRIGHT



» [PlayStation] The art direction is loaded with stylish shots and wild colour, each system feeling unique.

Hence, as Andy points out, not just the "cool detail but this slightly irreverent flavour".

There was a marked effort to have *Colony Wars* stand out from *Star Wars*. The game's composer, Tim Wright, was put on the project to help develop its identity. Tim began at Psygnosis in 1990 and scored many games, including *Lemmings*, *WipEout* and *Krazy Ivan*. "He said, 'We're looking for something cinematic, filmic,'" says Tim, on Andy's direction. "It never felt sort of *Star Wars*y to me," Tim says. "I always felt it was a bit more *Battlestar Galactica*. They were trying to build an actual universe, but it didn't feel as optimistic as *Star Trek*."

Tim's music bound *Colony Wars* in an unmistakable atmosphere. It is distinct from *Star Wars*, and yet the gravitational pull of John Williams was inevitable for Tim. "I wanted it to be cinematic," he says. "I was always a melody person. We're going back to John Williams again, but he's king of the fricking melody. You can't get away from it, he always has that refrain. So I aimed for that." Elsewhere, however, he shared Andy's passion for *Elite*. "I always said I would like to be cremated and have *The Blue Danube* play as my coffin goes behind the curtain," he says, "partly because of the game *Elite* on the BBC and the Commodore 64."

In the end, these disparate elements – of art and music, writing and programming – moved together, like moons around a sun. Despite the inevitable chaos of game development, with its frictions and factions, Andy was bound by a love of the final result. "The last few months of the project, you're like, 'That's it, once this is done I'm going to work in McDonalds!'" he says. "And then you get it out, and it's such a high that you then get on with the next one, and all the fun stuff starts again." *Colony Wars* released on 5 November 1997. It gained a cult following in the UK and greater financial success in the US – enough to earn two sequels, *Vengeance* and *Red Sun*. It isn't without its flaws, certainly, but it remains a cherished game for those who played it. "Don't let perfect be the enemy of good, or the enemy of done," Andy says, "because nothing is going to be perfect, and people can love its imperfections." ✱

» [PlayStation]You have numerous weapons, some dealing raw damage, while others disable shields.

» [PlayStation] As you rotate your view, the clashes can feel more vertiginous and daunting.

» [PlayStation] Your enemies are keen shooters, so evasive manoeuvres are vital to stay alive.

» [PlayStation] The in-cockpit view is a must for ogling the detail.

3
DK

Mario Party 2

HUDSON SOFT LEVELS UP

» NINTENDO 64 » 1998 » HUDSON SOFT

Although I rarely play the newer games, the early N64 *Mario Party* releases always received heavy play in the Jones residence. Despite the childish nature of them, they're a great way to unwind after an intense multiplayer FPS session (something the N64 was great for) and could get extremely competitive in their own right.

While the original *Mario Party* felt like a breath of fresh air on release, mainly due to there being very little like it on the console, it wasn't without its issues. Navigation could be annoying, it often felt like there was too much downtime between turns and it was notorious for some annoying minigames that required rapid rotation of the analogue stick that could lead to very sore palms.

For *Mario Party*'s sequel, numerous improvements were made, which included streamlining the navigation issues found in the original game, moving away from those hand-blistering minigames, adding collectible Items and introducing new Battle, Item and Duel minigames. In short it featured so many upgrades that I soon sold off the original game.

One of the things I've always loved about *Mario Party 2* is how cohesive the theming of the game is. All the game boards are extremely well designed and incorporate elements that are unique to each of their settings. Virtually all the included boards let you dress up in location-appropriate costumes and the vast majority of the new minigames are extremely well executed. The ability to practice a level before you compete in it is a nice touch, while the entertaining Mini-Game Land lets you purchase minigames from a sentient tree called Woody to play whenever you want.

Everything about *Mario Party 2* feels so much more polished and while it would eventually be put to rest in the Jones residence due to *Mario Party 5*, my youngest still shows enough interest in it that it's never likely to leave my collection. ✱

THE MAKING OF PERFECT

SOON AFTER COMPLETING THE DEVELOPMENT OF GOLDENEYE 007, ITS TEAM STARTED PUTTING TOGETHER IDEAS FOR AN FPS WITH AN ORIGINAL IP AND A FEMALE PROTAGONIST. PERFECT DARK CREATORS MARTIN HOLLIS AND DAVID DOAK EXPLAIN HOW THEY BETTERED BOND

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** RARE
- **PLATFORM:** NINTENDO 64
- **RELEASED:** 2000
- **GENRE:** FPS

■ *Perfect Dark* project leader Martin Hollis has been a software consultant, speaker and coach since 2010.

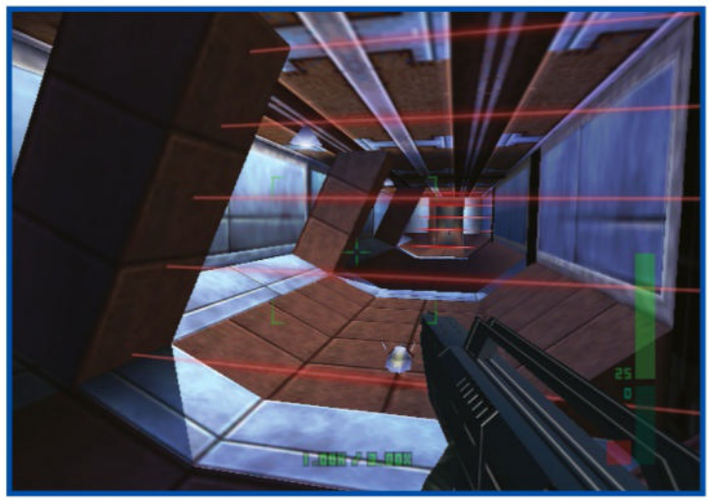
■ David Doak was a lead designer on *Perfect Dark* and is now a lecturer at Norwich University Of The Arts.

Most game studios wouldn't choose to follow up a highly popular game adapted from a globally recognised movie franchise with a spiritual successor based on a new IP, but then Rare isn't most studios. The renowned British developer adopted this approach after finishing work on its first-person shooter *GoldenEye 007*. The much-anticipated N64 title allowed players to take on the role of secret agent James Bond, but when the team that created *GoldenEye* came to making plans for its next FPS it chose to go in a completely different direction.

Perfect Dark team leader Martin Hollis reviews the background to this decision, and he reflects on the subsequent implications of his team making such a bold move. "It was obvious that we could do another *Bond* game. That would be the most straightforward thing, setting aside any difficulty with Nintendo and Eon Productions agreeing terms. But we knew that we wanted more of a challenge and a change, so I indicated to Nintendo we wouldn't be pursuing the licence for the next movie. But what would we make? It would need its own universe, which was something we hadn't done before."

Daunting as the prospect of worldbuilding was, the *GoldenEye* team weren't short of ideas. Designer David Doak offers further details on their decision to move on from Bond, before explaining how the basic premise for *Perfect Dark* was shaped by a shared passion.

» [Nintendo 64] *Perfect Dark* boss Cassandra De Vries is unarmed but evil, so pistol-whipping is the way to go.



"By the end of making *GoldenEye* we were all a bit done with doing Bond stuff, and I don't think Nintendo wanted to pay for the licence again. The feeling on the team was that we would rather do something of our own. We were all sci-fi fans, so it was almost inevitable that we would go in that direction."

The specifics of the core concept that was devised for *Perfect Dark* came from taking a holistic approach to sci-fi, where nothing that defined the genre was considered too low brow or overly sophisticated. Martin considers this while emphasising the influence of his team's previous project. "We agreed that we would concoct this story involving all the touchstones of science fiction, the corny things like laser guns as well as more meaty subjects like identity in the face of technology. This enthusiasm came chiefly from our love of Philip K Dick. What we tried to do was bring aliens, diplomacy and conflict to an FPS. This was being done throughout culture, and we really just tuned in to it. But critically our approach was Bond-like, in the sense that there was some camp, but overall it was semi-serious."

One area where *Perfect Dark* stood out from *GoldenEye* came from the decision to make its player character a woman, which was uncommon in games at the time and unheard

» [Nintendo 64] You're helped out by a drone in *Perfect Dark* that turns off laser barriers as it follows its route.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

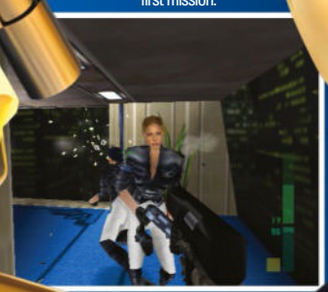
BLAST CORPS
PLATFORM: NINTENDO 64
RELEASED: 1997

GOLDENEYE 007
PLATFORM: NINTENDO 64
RELEASED: 1997

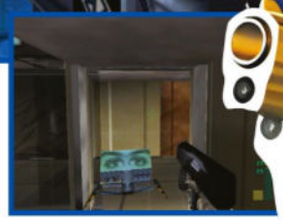
JET FORCE GEMINI (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: NINTENDO 64
RELEASED: 1999

DARK

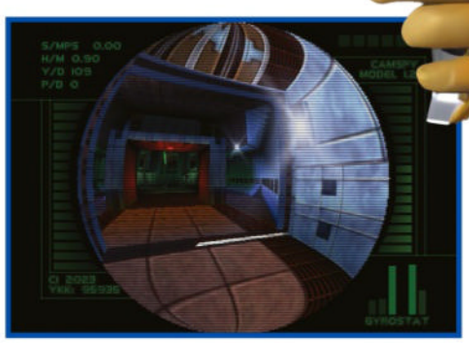
» [Nintendo 64] Shooting harmless civilians in *Perfect Dark* is pointless, and you fail your mission for doing so.



» [Nintendo 64] Opening doors and finding armed foes hidden behind them is common in *Perfect Dark*'s office-based first mission.



» [Nintendo 64] A strange plot twist in *Perfect Dark* results in you rescuing a defector who's a living computer.



» [Nintendo 64] Deadly radiation in one of *Perfect Dark*'s missions means you have to send a CamSpy to take photographs.

of in first-person shooters. David covers this and is reminded of another aspect of the design. "The female protagonist was there from the start, and we were very keen to not make her sexualised. We were trying to make an interesting female character. Brett Jones did all of the character design. I think her look was influenced by Winona Ryder in *Aliens: Resurrection*. We also decided we were going to have some aliens in the game."

On the subject of *Perfect Dark*'s heroine, Martin explains that Joanna Dark was just the latest in a line of female protagonists, albeit mainly leading ladies from films and TV shows rather than games. He also highlights another defining aspect of *Perfect Dark* and how that was approached. "The proof that it was OK to have a woman as a main character in a game came from an old game called *Snowball* by Level 9. Other than that there was [Dana] Scully, Leeloo, Nikita and many others who were surfacing at around that time. We also all knew that we wanted there to be humour. Absurd humour was the easiest. We dialled that as high as possible, and mixed it with every other kind of humour we could."

In terms of level design, *Perfect Dark* boasted less-confined spaces than there had been in ▶

"THE FEMALE PROTAGONIST WAS THERE FROM THE START, AND WE WERE VERY KEEN TO NOT MAKE HER SEXUALISED. WE WERE TRYING TO MAKE AN INTERESTING FEMALE CHARACTER"

DAVID DOAK

Armed & Dangerous

BASIC TRAINING ON SOME KEY PERFECT DARK WEAPONS

FALCON 2

The standard issue pistol used by covert operatives of the Carrington Institute, the Falcon 2's laser sight ensures accuracy and when it runs out of ammo it's ideally suited for pistol-whipping foes. It can be fitted with a silencer and a 2x zoom scope.

K7 AVENGER

Although less accurate than the Falcon 2, DataDyne's K7 assault rifle packs more of a punch and has a greater range. Its rapid firing and low capacity mean you're constantly reloading, but its threat detection mode picks up explosives and other hazards.

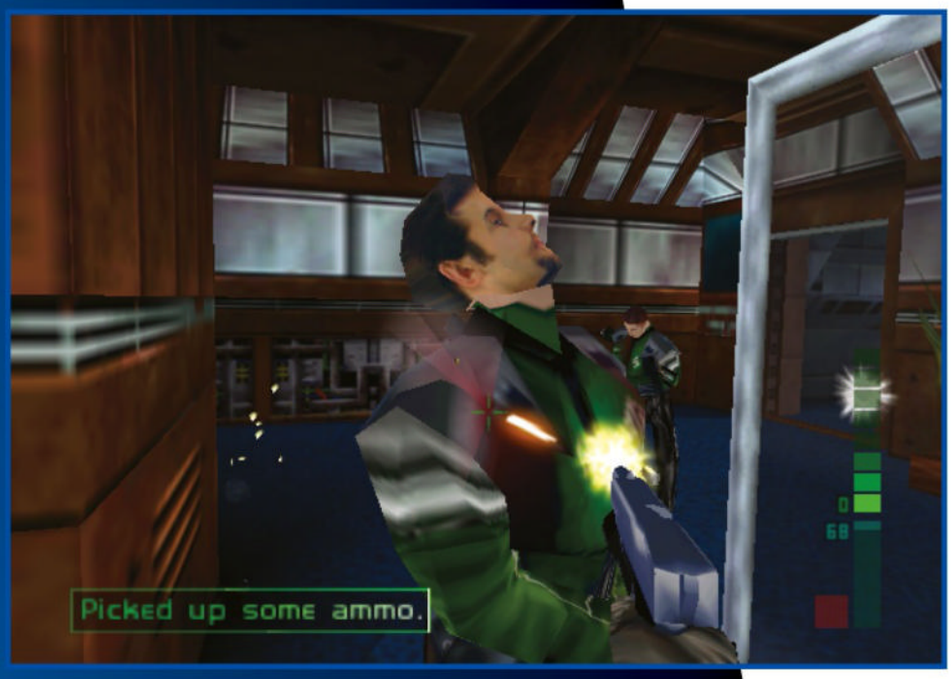
DRAGON

Compared to the K7 the Dragon seems like the lesser assault rifle, but it has some advantages. While it doesn't do as much damage or fire as rapidly, it has a higher capacity and better accuracy. You can also opt to use it as a powerful proximity mine.

CMP-150

Not only is DataDyne's sub-machine gun fully automatic with a very high rate of fire, but its lightweight profile means you can carry one in each hand. The CMP-150 burns through ammo, but this failing is balanced by its ability to lock onto targets.

» [Nintendo 64] When you're plunged into darkness in *Perfect Dark* a night vision visor is a literal life saver.



» [Nintendo 64] There are times in *Perfect Dark* where a close-up kill is the best option you've got.

GoldenEye. Martin notes that the extent to which this happened in stages, the character of those levels and their impact on the game's storyline depended largely on their designers. "The big wide-open levels had a different kind of goodness. Usually the artist would be given a one-word to one-sentence brief, and they would make the thing. You can really see the artists' personality or preferences about 'space' in the game. The shape of the spaces you walk through is a large part of the story you experience when you play a first-person shooter, and the more unusual constructions gave variety but also narrative."

The guiding principles that *Perfect Dark*'s level artists adhered to incorporated a focus on outdoor areas, they even went to the extent of creating interior environments that showcased the world outside. David highlights how this brief was achieved by a couple of the game's memorable environments. "We had a checklist of things we wanted to do, like the tower block in the opening level and the drop onto it from the helicopter. It was a glass-walled building so that you could see the cityscape outside. Then the Carrington mansion had a spatial narrative about infiltrating it from the outside by deciding where you wanted to go in."

Another consideration was which direction to go with *Perfect Dark*'s weapons, especially since its sci-fi narrative meant there were few restrictions. Martin explains his gatekeeper role in this respect, and concedes he had some concerns over an X-ray gun that could reveal upcoming opponents. "The envelope was large enough that we could steal or borrow anything we liked from anywhere. It was reshaped to suit a videogame, and provided it worked then everything was good. An outlier was the FarSight gun, which was high in coolness factor. Sadly we knew it wouldn't work. The essence of an FPS is that you meet characters in sequence, not all at once, but then Mark Edmonds said he could probably implement it."

» [Nintendo 64] It's quite far into *Perfect Dark* when you get a sniper rifle of the sort that defined *GoldenEye*.

Far from being content with creating space-age guns, it was decided that each weapon should have additional functionality. These secondary uses ranged from pistol-whipping to improvised explosives, all triggered with the push of a button. David outlines the genre appropriate reasons for this approach. "The weapons design for *Perfect Dark* evolved enormously after we had left, but we did have secondary uses in place. I think that might have come from Tim [Stamper]. Since we were doing sci-fi then we could make up a bunch of shit. A sci-fi gun is effectively magic, so it can magically be changed to do something else!"

A different aspect of *Perfect Dark*'s combat fell under the category of suspending disbelief rather than sci-fi wizardry. David points out its failings, and touches on the advantage gained from remembering to go into firefights fully loaded compared to forgetting and having to reload under fire. "You could kill a guy to get his weapon or you could just take it off him, although it's a bit whimsical isn't it? You couldn't really snatch someone's gun by bamboozling them! Then doing interesting things like the reloads generated a cadence of gameplay, because if you got the timing right it was really satisfying."

As well as developing its combat, *Perfect Dark*'s designers worked to make their game's missions tougher to complete than those in *GoldenEye*. Martin observes how this wasn't written in stone, but rather it was a product of his team's familiarity with the game. "There wasn't a bullet point in a design document saying, '*Perfect Dark* will be harder than *GoldenEye*,' but as you play a game for month after month you get better and can tolerate tougher challenges. The second thing was the taste of the designers. On *GoldenEye* we pushed the difficulty as far as we dared to go, because we liked the difficulty, and then I think we were emboldened by what we got away with."

> *"THE BIG WIDE-OPEN LEVELS HAD A DIFFERENT KIND OF GOODNESS. YOU CAN REALLY SEE THE ARTISTS' PERSONALITY OR PREFERENCES ABOUT 'SPACE' IN THE GAME"*
>
> **MARTIN HOLLIS**

Not only did *Perfect Dark* end up being more challenging than its predecessor but it also had deeper gameplay, and more of it. David reasons that this was inevitable given the wealth of content that ▶

» [Nintendo 64] *Perfect Dark*'s depiction of Chicago's mean streets shows the influence of *Blade Runner* on the game.

MISSION BRIEFING

TOUGH ASSIGNMENTS SET FOR JOANNA DARK IN PERFECT DARK

DATADYNE CENTRAL – DEFECTION

■ In the opening mission you rely on stealth and preserving ammo. You make your way down the building picking off solo agents before reaching a foyer where you face a team of operatives. Success leads to a hidden door and an elevator to the next mission.

CARRINGTON VILLA

■ When Daniel Carrington is kidnapped you have to save his negotiator by picking off armed escorts before dispatching rooftop guards and storming his villa. After restoring power to the basement under heavy fire you need to locate Daniel before he talks.

CHICAGO

■ You're unarmed going into the Windy City, and the streets are crawling with agents. After defeating them you find hidden kit in a canal, including a device that causes an AI taxi to crash – when that distracts the guards at the G5 building you head in.

AREA 51 – INFILTRATION

■ After a Carrington Institute craft is shot down in Nevada you travel to Area 51. You first have to blow-up a radar control unit, then you need to take down guards to get a key card for the hanger lift where a spy disguised as a guard is waiting for you.

"YOU WOULD SUDDENLY GET SOME REALLY DANGEROUS ENEMIES THAT MIGHT NOT JUST HIDE AROUND THE CORNER, THEY MIGHT JUST FUCKING RUSH YOU"

DAVID DOAK

there hadn't been time to incorporate into the team's *Bond* game. "I guess the length of the campaign was just because more is better. You did get a greater variety of things. There were more intricate objectives, like at the start in the DataDyne building you had that little spy cam. I think a lot of that grew out of making *GoldenEye*, because there were a lot of things that we had mentally shelved."

An entirely fresh idea was *Perfect Dark*'s Area 51 stage, which began in a wide-open outdoor area surrounded by high security fences. David clarifies that Area 51 was less open world than it felt, and he remembers there being the means to get out of it quickly. "You were still in corridors; they were just very *big* corridors – from a design point of view open worlds are only great until you discover how boring they can be! At the time, FPSes were beginning to do vehicles, so Area 51 had an anti-grav bike. Although really you were kind of pretending; it was like someone on a hobby horse!"

» [Nintendo 64] Unlike in *GoldenEye*, you can fall off the narrow platforms in *Perfect Dark* if you're not careful.

» [Nintendo 64] The cloaked enemies in *Perfect Dark* don't make for easy targets, but they occasionally break cover.

In addition to the single-player campaign designed for *Perfect Dark*, a multiplayer deathmatch mode was devised that, unlike *GoldenEye*'s, could be played against AI opposition as well as human rivals. Martin wasn't there for its implementation, but he gives it his unqualified approval. "My watch came to an end after about 14 months on *Perfect Dark*, and I left the firm, so I can't speak definitively on this feature. However, I think they did an outstanding job. If you played the game with a group of people then that was a privileged situation. For many players, getting four people together was a difficult proposition, and so having automatic opponents gave an approximation to the four-player experience."

It's perhaps unsurprising that David's opinion of *Perfect Dark*'s well-worked AI deathmatches is similarly high. Talk of multiplayer also sparks a memory of concerns over a certain weapon's impact on these matches, but as David caveats, these turned out to be unwarranted. "The *Perfect Dark* multiplayer stuff almost all evolved after we had gone, but we were working on it. The bots in *Perfect Dark* were really good. Then another interesting thing was that the FarSight as a multiplayer weapon would surely be too powerful, but it wasn't because you could mitigate it by weighting other stuff in the design."

INTRIGUING INFLUENCES

THE CORE INSPIRATIONS THAT SHAPED PERFECT DARK

LA FEMME NIKITA

■ Androgynous but attractive, vulnerable but a hardened killer, guided by a father figure but a lone wolf; these qualities defined the character Nikita from the movie and cancelled PS2 game. It's no accident that Joanna Dark shares these character traits.

LARA CROFT

■ An influence in so much as *Perfect Dark* animator Brett Jones wanted to make Joanna Dark the antithesis of Lara. The idea was that Joanna should be a less two-dimensional character with more spark. Brett wanted *Perfect Dark*'s protagonist to be more human than Lara.

BLADE RUNNER

■ The corporate towers and rain-soaked neon-lit streets from *Blade Runner* are like a blueprint for *Perfect Dark*'s DataDyne building and Chicago stages. They're only slightly less evocative of the film's look and style than the *Blade Runner* game from 1997.

GOLDENEYE 007

■ In terms of gameplay, it's not surprising that *Perfect Dark* owes a debt to its developers' previous first-person shooter *GoldenEye*. *Perfect Dark*'s focus on projectile weapons with zoom scopes, stealth and mission-based exploration all come by way of the *Bond* title.

» [Xbox 360] The best way to play *Perfect Dark* today is the modern update that was released in 2010 and is available on *Rare Replay*. It adds various upgrades, including a more stable framerate.

» [Nintendo 64] Gadgets play a big part in *Perfect Dark*, including one that turns an automated taxi into a bomb.

A second aspect of *Perfect Dark* that was finished after David left Rare was its Counter Operative mode. He likes the idea of two players on opposite sides in missions, and especially the second player controlling enemy after enemy as each gets taken down by Joanna Dark. "A real person could engage in much more brinkmanship; it didn't matter if they died because they were going to get another chance. So you would suddenly get some really dangerous enemies that might not just hide around the corner, they might just fucking rush you because they knew they would get a couple of shots off and inflict some damage."

It's fair to conclude that players shared David's enthusiasm for *Perfect Dark*, so much so that it sold in its millions. Reflecting on its merits decades after its release, David reconciles the few regrets he has with his overwhelmingly positive feelings towards the game. "I obviously look back at it and see all of the warts, all of the things I wished I had fixed or done slightly differently. However, it's stood the test of time and it's made a lot of people happy. For me, career wise, that's the thing that I'm most proud of. It's people saying that they really love a game I made."

It seems only fair to give the final words to *Perfect Dark*'s project leader. Martin uses those to praise what is arguably Rare's finest first-person shooter. He finishes by highlighting the sheer ambition of the project, and emphasises how that enhances the experience of playing it. "I think it's a lot of fun! And everywhere you turn in the game, in the menu and in the levels, there's more fun to be had. I can't think of a first-person shooter anywhere that tries to do so much and with such depth and breadth, and so many embellishments and ornaments. It really is an extraordinary artefact." ✱

» [Nintendo 64] You don't know what lurks in the lower levels of *Perfect Dark*'s Area 51, so it's best to be prepared.

The Sims™

ZANY WORLDBUILDING CAPITALISM SIMULATOR THE SIMS HAS BEEN A MAINSTAY OF POPULAR CULTURE FOR MORE THAN A QUARTER-CENTURY. A CORE ELEMENT OF THE SERIES' SUCCESS IS JERRY MARTIN'S DIVERSE ARRAY OF PLAYFUL, KOOKY MUSIC, WHICH HAS SERVED AS THE SOUNDTRACK OF MANY CHILDHOODS AROUND THE WORLD

WORDS BY LIAM HEITMANN-RYCE-LEMERCIER

IN THE KNOW

- **» DEVELOPER:** MAXIS
- **» COMPOSER:** JERRY MARTIN
- **» BEST TRACK:** MALL RAT
- **» RELEASE:** FEBRUARY 2000
- **» PLATFORM:** PC, VARIOUS
- **» GENRE:** LIFE SIMULATION

***The Sims* is one of the most instantly recognisable videogame franchises of the last 25 years and, since the first title's release barely two months into the new millennium, has secured a dominant place in popular culture.** The game's famously nonsensical language, Simlish, essentially rendered it translation-free for global markets, and the iconic green diamond that floats above each Sim's head has inspired generations of Halloween costumes.

Equally well loved is the quirky, jazz- and bossa nova-tinged music from composer Jerry Martin, which continues to do the rounds in viral social media content today. A common narrative among millennials who came of age during *The Sims*' original run across the Noughties is how these games formed the soundtracks of their childhood.

» [PC] Jerry's music does a great job of matching the quirkiness of the game.

"The best part about it for me," Jerry says, reflecting on the franchise's impact, "is I get quite a bit of fan mail from people all over the place, saying how much they love the music and how they grew up with it. It just makes me feel really, really good."

While he does confess his apprehension in being associated only with *The Sims*, the enormous audience of the games did give Jerry a broad platform to demonstrate his prodigious range as a composer. However, the eclectic mashup of genres across *The Sims'* soundtrack was a deliberate choice to heighten the game's comedic potential. "When I was thinking of *The Sims*, the thing that's going to be the funniest is if the music is very authentic to the style. So the Fifties shopping music, I tried to make that as authentic as possible. Also for the bossa nova music, the beats were very authentic to bossa nova, where the chord progressions are very chromatic. So my joke on it was that if it's really authentic to the genre, it's going to somehow be funnier."

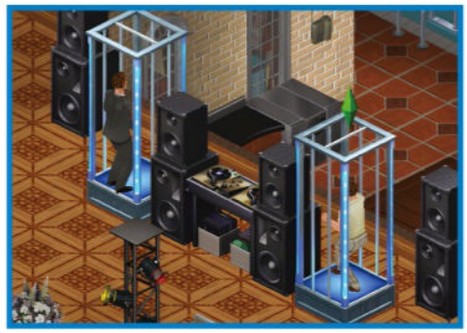
This impressive commitment to the bit was far from a simple means of garnering a few chuckles from players. As with every track Jerry penned for *The Sims*, these amusing genre explorations were the result of considerable thought and surprising sources of inspiration.

While he credits Maxis cofounder Will Wright for the suggestion to use bossa nova and new-age piano music, the famous shopping music was taken straight from the airwaves. He flatly rejects any inspiration from retro KPM stock music, "I didn't know anything about that; it's not like I listened to any of that stuff," he says – he does credit *The Simpsons* composer Alf

■ Composer Jerry Martin has provided music for 24 *Sims*-related videogames, as well as more than 200 high-profile adverts for brands such as Armani and Yamaha. He is based in California and today runs a boutique online music outlet, BoomBamBoom, freelancing as a composer and sound designer.

» [PC] Jerry was inspired by all sorts of music, with Maxis founder Will Wright suggesting bossa nova to him.

» [PC] Jerry continues scoring music for the popular series, including *The Sims 4*.



» [PC] That's an impressive sound system, no wonder everyone is having a good time.

» [PC] A friendly game of pool between friends.

Clausen. "I remember seeing a *Simpsons* episode at one point, when I was just watching TV. And it was Homer, I think it was like a Willy Wonka thing, where he was kind of strolling through this chocolate factory, very happy. The music of *The Simpsons* was really great, and when I heard this particular scene, I went, 'Wow, that's perfect! I'm gonna steal that idea.'"

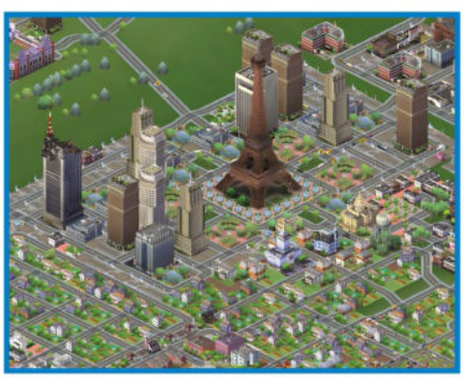
> "SO MY JOKE ON IT WAS THAT IF IT'S REALLY AUTHENTIC TO THE GENRE, IT'S GOING TO SOMEHOW BE FUNNIER"
> JERRY MARTIN

While Jerry could not remember precisely, the scene he describes is likely the famous Land Of Chocolate dream sequence from a season 3 episode of the show. Scored to a frothy pizzicato piece by Clausen, the famous sequence demonstrates quite obvious inspirations for Jerry's own strings-heavy *Mall Rat* track. Where Jerry stepped away from the more tongue-in-cheek inspirations of the first *Sims* game, his far grander orchestral work for the *SimCity* titles presented a markedly different shade of his compositional repertoire. Notably, the *Rush Hour* expansion pack for 2003's *SimCity 4* featured the 70-piece Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra, as well as some prominent minimalist inspirations for the music itself.

"I went to Mills College when I was getting my master's degree, and I studied with Terry Riley, who was like the father of minimalism. I was always really interested in that sound," Jerry says of the highly repetitive compositional style Riley pioneered in the Sixties. "So when you have something like minimalism, that doesn't have a lot of structure in it – no big chord changes or anything that's going to take your attention – it's pretty hypnotic. It seemed to really fit the mood of *SimCity* because you're sitting there for hours, tinkering around with your city."

With so many years of work invested into such a lasting videogame series, Jerry has trouble pinpointing just one standout moment. True to form, however, the one anecdote he pulls out is typically quirky. "The funniest part was related to the Simlish," he remembers, "where we were doing rap music. I put out a cattle call for rappers to sing. I think I just used Craigslist, 'Hey, any rappers, you want to try rapping to this in gibberish?'"

The call out required Jerry to vet the rappers to make sure they could improvise in Simlish, with the auditions taking place in the Maxis offices. Five men turned up dressed in what Jerry calls their "rap clothes". The building's receptionist was a kind, elderly woman who notified Jerry of their arrival. "So they came up to the front office, looking like gangsters, and it was just so funny to have this nice old lady say, 'Oh, Jerry, your rappers are here.' So I came out and led them back into the studio. It was just really funny that happened." ✱



» [PC] *Sim City 3000* is another game that Jerry contributed music to.

WHAT'S MY LINE?

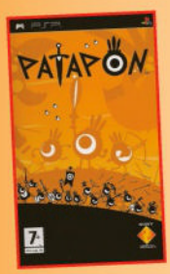
Comedian Drew Carey's Sims cameo is a well-covered Easter egg, but a lesser-known tidbit is his surprising inability to improvise

■ Host of improv-comedy series *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* Drew Carey was an early superfan of *The Sims* and, remembers Jerry Martin, eager to record some lines in the game's bizarre made-up language, Simlish. "But the thing that was funny about it," Jerry says, "is he couldn't improvise any Simlish. At one point he was down in LA, so I had sent one of my sound designers to record him. And he comes back and he goes, 'Yeah, the guy couldn't improvise at all.'" Ironically, for a performer known nation-wide as the host of an improv show, Carey had to write down his lines for the fake language. "So it was like a script," Jerry says with a chuckle. "He was reading all this gibberish off a piece of paper. You know, I thought that was hilarious."

THE MAKING OF PATAPON

SONY'S FIRST HANDHELD WAS AN AMBITIOUS ACHIEVEMENT THAT MIXED GAMING WITH MULTIMEDIA PLEASURE. IT WAS ALSO FULL OF WEIRD AND WONDERFUL GAMES, WITH PATAPON BEING A BRILLIANT EXAMPLE OF THE CREATIVITY THAT COULD BE FOUND ON THE CONSOLE

WORDS BY JAMES TOCCHIO



IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
- **DEVELOPER:** PYRAMID, JAPAN STUDIO
- **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION PORTABLE
- **RELEASED:** 2008
- **GENRE:** RHYTHM ACTION

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DEVIL DICE
PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION
RELEASED: 1998

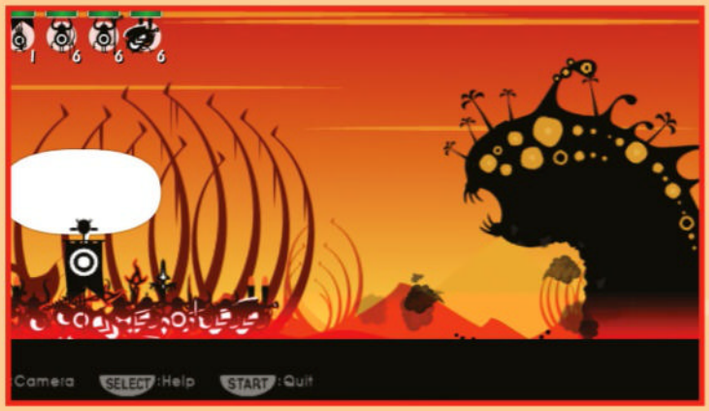
APE ESCAPE (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION
RELEASED: 1999

SKYGUNNER
PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION 2
RELEASED: 2001

When the former head of Sony Computer Entertainment America, Kaz Hirai, introduced Sony's PlayStation Portable at E3 in 2004, he said the word 'new' twenty times over a five-minute period. Hirai and Sony promised their new device would be a music player, a portable television and movie theatre, a camera, an internet browser, and yes, even a game system. The new PSP, he said, would bring a new future in which new consumers could enjoy new types of interaction with new entertainment through new technologies. Yet aside from a small smattering of actual new experiences, such as Tetsuya Mizuguchi's *Lumines*, the first year of life for Sony's PSP brought games that were mostly ports, or downgraded and simplified conversions of PlayStation 2 games. Many were fun enough, but 'new' they were certainly not.

To bolster the PSP library and fulfil the promise of its first handheld system, Sony urged its internal studios and third-party developers alike to get weird, to dream up concepts that had never been done and to create games that could only exist on Sony's system. Hiroyuki Kotani, a producer and game designer working at Sony Interactive Entertainment's Japan Studio, remembers those early days. "At the time, the team I belonged to was focussed exclusively on developing for the PSP," he tells us. "We were trying to create a new movement for handheld gaming, so we reached out not only to game developers, but also to artists from other industries in search of new possibilities."

This search eventually led Kotani to an obscure website belonging to French illustrator Sebastien Giuli, better known as Rolito. The site functioned as the artist's interactive portfolio and featured an army of black silhouette figures with oversized eyeballs as its central characters. They marched, fought, and fired arrows across colourful simplified landscapes in Flash animations hosted on this weird and whimsical corner of the early internet which its creator called "Rolitoland". When Kotani saw Rolito's eyeball army, he instantly imagined them as characters in a new type of game for Sony's new handheld system.



» [PSP] Kotani told us he and Rolito worried about how detailed the bosses should be.

» A screenshot of Rolito's website circa 2006, showing early Patapon-like creatures.

■ Hiroyuki Kotani created *Patapon* and served as the game's designer. Kotani's latest project is *Ratatan*, the spiritual successor to *Patapon*.

» [PSP] The basic gameplay premise is simple; maintain a four-beat rhythm at all times!

» [PSP] The Zigotons are the Patapons' great rival, a tribe of red-eyed warriors.

» [PSP] These Patapon sure do have a love for **Retro Gamer** Magazine.

"I discovered these eye-like characters that would eventually become the basis for *Patapon*," Kotani recalls. "At that stage, I didn't know how far this would go as a game. Game development is often like that. However, I felt strongly that if we could successfully incorporate that simple yet striking visual presence into a game then it would definitely become a hit."

At this early stage, *Patapon* had taken shape only in the mind of Kotani, and even there it hardly resembled the game that was eventually released. Kotani tells us that one of his earliest concepts was inspired by *The Wizard Of Oz*. In this early ideation, a young girl is suddenly transported along with her house into an unfamiliar world where she meets a mysterious tribe that communicates solely through drumming. The tribe would help her find her way home. "The idea was so unique," Kotani says. "And there were no comparable titles at the time. I think it was initially difficult for people to visualise [it]. However, the visual concept we created based on Rolito's artwork, showing armies clashing, was very fresh and compelling. That helped us convey the potential of the idea and ultimately led to approval to create a prototype."

With approval from Sony secured, Kotani approached the developers at a relatively new game studio called Pyramid and shared his vision: he saw a game in which the player controls a band of Rolito's little warriors as they trek across a whimsical wilderness similarly inspired by Rolito's artwork. The warrior eyeballs would hunt for meat, battle monsters and rival tribes, traverse the continent on a quest to reach Earthend and fulfil their destiny by gazing upon a mysterious entity known only as IT.

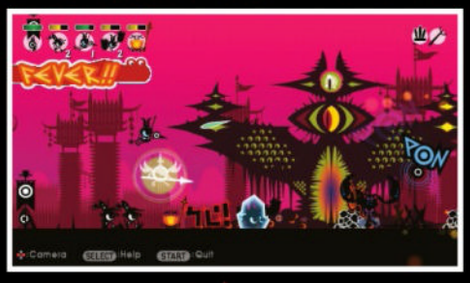
> "WE WERE TRYING TO CREATE A NEW MOVEMENT FOR HANDHELD GAMING"
> HIROYUKI KOTANI

What separated Kotani's vision from other games, aside from Rolito's unique art style, would be *Patapon*'s method of control. Rather than control the army via typical directional buttons, Kotani imagined a rhythm game where the player would press the PSP's face buttons to beat drums in time with the game's music.

Certain combinations of button presses would produce specific drumming patterns to spur the troops forward or order the warriors to attack, retreat, or defend. In this way, Kotani had imagined something like a hybrid of real-time strategy and musical rhythm games. For ▶

PATAPON MARCHES ON

TWO SEQUELS AND A REMASTER KEEP THE BEAT ALIVE



PATAPON 2

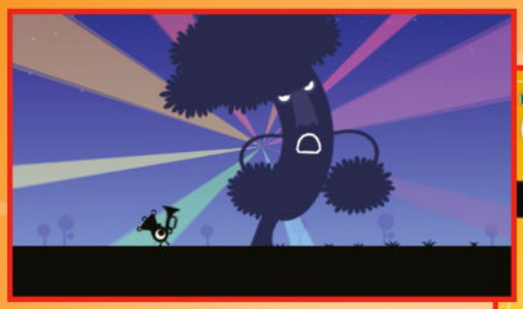
Patapon's sequel was in some ways a definitive expansion of the original. While the core gameplay was nearly identical to its predecessor, it introduced several new elements, including new ways to evolve the Patapon army, new unlockable units and a four-player ad-hoc multiplayer mode.

PATAPON 3

The third *Patapon* game released in 2011, and while it innovated in some ways, it fell short in others. Multiplayer expanded to include a four-player battle mode, and the game pushed an interesting RPG-like levelling mechanic. However, players controversially controlled just four Patapons rather than large armies.

PATAPON 1+2 REPLAY

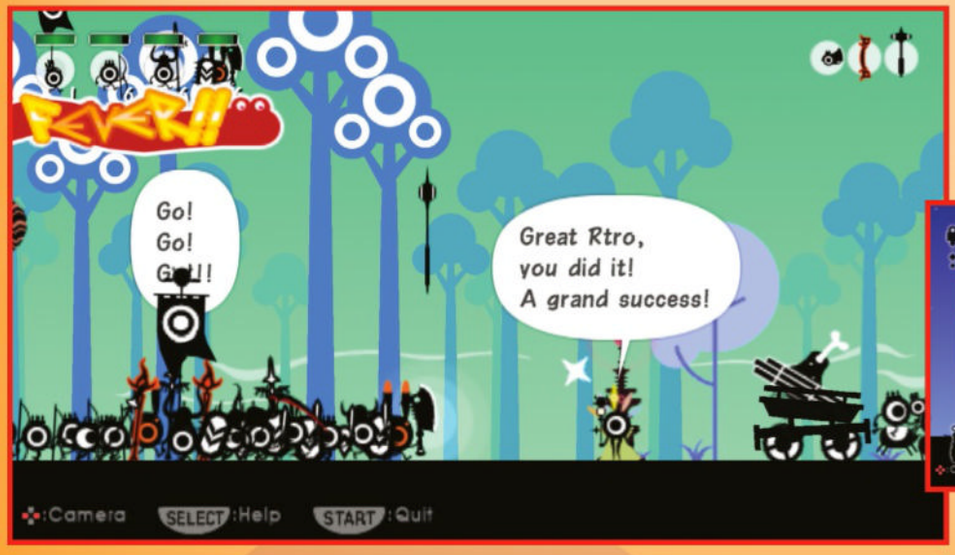
A remastered version of the original *Patapon* was released in 2017 on PlayStation 4 before being superseded by 2025's expanded release of *Patapon 1+2 Replay*. This newest game combines remastered versions of *Patapon* and its sequel, *Patapon 2*, for the Nintendo Switch, PlayStation 5 and PC.



» [PSP] Ubo Bon is a dancing tree. Play the trumpet to shake loose crafting materials.

» [PSP] There are environmental hazards, too, like lightning and scorching deserts that must be crossed.

» [PSP] You'll unlock plenty of additional Patapons throughout the game, including the uncommon Rarepons.



» [PSP] Materials and items in the game let you craft Patapons, weapons and armour.

such a thing to work, the game's audio design would have to be simply perfect. Fortunately for Kotani, Japan Studio had a secret weapon.

Composer Kemmei Adachi had just finished a collaboration on the infectious soundtrack to *LocoRoco*, another Japan Studio title for the PSP similarly determined to ignore all conventions. Kotani invited Adachi to *Patapon*'s earliest brainstorming sessions, something unusual for a sound designer, and together they created the core concept of *Patapon*.

They decided that the PSP's face buttons would correspond to sounds made by four different drums, and that each would have its own name, noise, and effect on the gameplay. Square, for example, would be Pata, while Circle would be Pon, and tapping Square, Square, Square, Circle would create the rhythmic drumming of Pata-Pata-Pata-Pon! This combination of drumbeats would signal the Patapon army to march forward while the different combination of Pon-Pon-Pata-Pon! would cause the Patapons to attack, and so forth.

Several combinations of drumbeats were imagined to control the Patapon army, and memorising the patterns immediately became as critical as simply maintaining a rhythm. This would be the game's central mechanic and

its most challenging gameplay demand. The player must not only watch the action on the screen, attack, defend, advance and retreat at the appropriate moments, but do so while recalling the correct drumming patterns, and make sure to beat to the beat! "In *Patapon*," says Kotani, "the player was required to maintain rhythm at all times, demanding intense focus – a somewhat stoic, immersive experience centred on rhythm itself."

The music was intended to be primal or tribal, heavy with percussion and suitable for marching. It was composed of various instruments from all around the world including bagpipes, congas, and bongos. In an interview published on the PlayStation Blog in 2017, Adachi even joked that he used the opportunity to learn how to play the didgeridoo, a wind instrument developed by the Aboriginal people of Australia nearly 1,000 years ago (though that instrument never made it into the game's final soundtrack).

Layered atop this primal orchestration were vocal tracks, many of which had their origin in Japanese folk songs. "Adachi would compose the music," Kotani tells us, "and I would add choruses and call-and-response elements, which we recorded live." For these vocals, Kotani pulled talent from an unusual source. "Blico," credited as the voice actor for "Patapon/Jigoton & Vocals" was in fact Kotani's ten-year-old son.

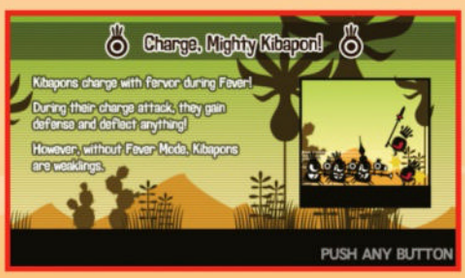
> "THERE WERE NO COMPARABLE TITLES AT THE TIME. I THINK IT WAS INITIALLY DIFFICULT FOR PEOPLE TO VISUALISE [IT]"
> HIROYUKI KOTANI

Over the course of development, *Patapon* had found its visual identity in Rolito's art, its unique voice in Adachi's music, and its mechanical rhythm in Kotani's call-and-response gameplay. What really set it apart, though, was not the visuals or the music or the gameplay, but how these unique elements came together, how the game's design unified the Patapons with the player.

As you play *Patapon*, you begin to feel connected to the Patapons, connected to the music and to the game itself. The Patapons are not passive characters, or even mindlessly controlled minions. They're highly interactive characters with real personalities. Mistime a command and the Patapons will let you know. They stumble and fall, move nervously and groan at you sadly as the drums falter. Get closer to matching the rhythm and the Patapons' mood (and the music) improves. Beat the drums perfectly, match the game's rhythm just right, and everything clicks into place.

The drums resonate with power, the army surges ahead with confidence, the Patapons sing and add their own refrains and melodies to the music. Build a combo and enter Fever Mode and the PSP's screen erupts into a celebration of percussion and song. Patapons cheer, improvise little musical flourishes between commands, and transform what began as a simple strategy game into something like a performance.

In this way, *Patapon*'s soundtrack is never merely background music. The player actively shapes it through their actions. Every successful command builds momentum, transforming the act of issuing orders into something communal. You're not just controlling the Patapons or playing a game. You're performing with them. Play well, and it's almost as if you've joined


Charge, Mighty Kibapon!
Kibapons charge with fervor during Fever!
During their charge attack, they gain defense and deflect anything!
However, without Fever Mode, Kibapons are weaklings.
PUSH ANY BUTTON

» [PSP] Patapons mounted on horses charge from the backline, knocking back enemies.

RATA-RATA-RATATAN

PATAPON'S SPIRITUAL SUCCESSOR MARCHES TO ITS OWN DRUM

In July 2023, at the Japanese videogame trade show BitSummit, Ratata Arts unveiled *Ratatan*, a spiritual successor to *Patapon*. Directed by *Patapon*'s creator Hiroyuki Kotani and featuring music by *Patapon*'s composer Kemmei Adachi, *Ratatan* promised a glorious return to the rhythmic world of *Patapon*.

A Kickstarter campaign launched in August of that same year and rapidly secured over £1 million. Development marched on with support from Tokyo Virtual Theory, whose developers had previously worked on *Freedom Wars*, *God Eater*, *Metal Gear Solid 3*, and the *.hack//GU* series. In September 2025 *Ratatan* released in Early Access on Steam, where it currently holds a Very Positive rating based on over 900 user reviews.

At first glance, *Ratatan* looks and sounds very familiar. It's vibrant and gorgeous, with lovingly crafted 2D graphics and endless, catchy tunes that burrow into your ear canals. Players command an army of cute warriors, press buttons to the beat, and march through a wondrous land on a 30+ hour adventure. But *Ratatan* expands the *Patapon* formula, too. It adds procedurally generated content, roguelike elements, online support for co-op play and large-scale battles of more than 100 characters. It's *Patapon* for a new era.

» [PC] *Ratatan* is out now in full release on XBOX, PlayStation 5, and PC.

A GOLDEN ERA

A SYSTEM DEFINED BY INDIE-LIKE EXPERIMENTATION

Patapon didn't magically appear. It was made by people who were interested in trying new things and came from a time when game companies like Sony were cultivating a culture of experimentation. Many unusual games were born during the Nineties and Noughties through programs like Game Yaroze, where indie devs and students could submit their game prototypes and receive support from Sony's own developers, and with hardware like the Net Yaroze Playstation, which was a PlayStation dev kit that consumers could purchase. (Yaroze means 'let's do it together'.)

While the PSP is naturally defined by its most successful games – *Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories*, *Monster Hunter Portable 3rd*, *Gran Turismo* and *God Of War* are among its best-selling titles – it is the system's smaller-scale titles that hold out-sized importance for many fans.

With the mind-bending puzzler *Echochrome*, the bouncy joy of *LocoRoco*, the musical shooter *Every Extend Extra*, the Japan-only *Everybody's Stress Buster* and so many more, the PSP offered something truly new. These games (and many others) reveal a side of the PSP that sales charts can't capture. Beside the blockbuster releases was a handheld console filled with curious experiments and games that delighted in doing things differently. That willingness to surprise players remains one of the system's most enduring qualities.

» [PSP] *Lumines* was a huge hit for the Sony handheld console.

» [PSP] Secret JUJU discovered along the way give special abilities, like controlling the rain or wind.

» [PSP] Invoking the secret JUJU requires performing a special dance, a minigame in itself.

the tribe. "What I value most is a sense of unity," Kotani tells us. "This applies not only to the feel of the controls, but also to the emotional connection between the player and the characters. From the first time you beat the drum, Pon-Pon-Pata-Pon! and the Patapons march forward, I believe players are already experiencing that sense of unity."

> "LOOKING BACK TODAY, IT'S EASY TO SEE PATAPON AS ONE OF THE PSP'S DEFINING GAMES"

***Patapon* debuted in Japan in 2007, with the rest of the world experiencing Kotani's weird and beautiful game in early 2008.** It was lauded by critics and quickly marched onto 800,000 PSPs, an impressive number for Sony's young portable system. The game's sales success brought two PSP sequels, each adding new mechanics to the series.

Patapon 2 arrived in 2008/2009, and with the core rhythm-strategy formula established, Kotani and his team began looking for ways to strengthen the bond between player and tribe. The most visible result was the introduction of the Hero, a masked Patapon capable of unleashing powerful abilities through perfect play. The decision was not without controversy. "At the time, the producer objected," Kotani recalls. "'How can you cover the eyes of the Patapons, which we've been promoting as eye-like creatures?'"

For Kotani, however, the Hero served an important purpose. In the original game, the player existed outside the world, issuing commands like a distant deity. The Hero provided a bridge between the player and the army itself. "This was an essential element to connect the player, who had previously existed outside the game, with the Patapons themselves," he tells us.

The sequel also introduced Hero Mode, a system that rewards players for maintaining perfect rhythm. Rather than forcing players to memorise additional commands, the mode activates through exceptionally accurate play. "This aligns with *Patapon*'s core design philosophy," says Kotani. "Minimising what players need to memorise or consciously think about, allowing them to immerse themselves more deeply."

» [PSP] Defeated bosses evolve over time, and you can revisit levels to find new challenges.

» [PSP] A timing-based cooking minigame allows you to make super soups!

» PSP] What lies at the ends of the Earth? "IT" does, apparently…

By the time *Patapon 3* arrived in 2011, the series had expanded even further. Multiplayer, introduced in a limited form in *Patapon 2*, became a central focus. According to Kotani, one of the biggest technical hurdles was allowing players to move seamlessly between solo play and online multiplayer despite the PSP's limited memory. The team also devised a guild system that functioned entirely through PlayStation Network services without requiring dedicated game servers.

In July of 2023, Kotani and Adachi announced a spiritual successor to *Patapon*. Called *Ratatan*, the new game would feature roguelike elements, massively expanded rhythm strategy gameplay, more infectious music from Kemmei Adachi, and new character designs by the artist Nelnal. One month later, they launched a Kickstarter campaign to fund the game's development and *Ratatan* was fully funded within just 45 minutes. "We're incredibly grateful," Kotani told us. "We had thorough preparation from the team leading up to launch and support from dedicated fans since the *Patapon* days, […] I had a sense that 'this might really work.' We're truly thankful."

Looking back today, it's easy to see *Patapon* as one of the PSP's defining games. It was a title whose art style, music and mechanics were distinct and fresh. More importantly, they were legitimate new expressions, making good on the promise of Sony's do-everything handheld. And while that newness remains fresh nearly two decades later, *Patapon*'s lasting appeal may be rooted in something even deeper.

"What makes something fun?" Kotani muses. This is the question that keeps coming to him decades into his game design career. The answer he found in *Patapon* was connection. Rhythm, strategy and visual novelty mattered, but only insofar as they strengthened the bond between player and tribe. The journey means something because, as Kotani puts it, the player becomes part of the tribe. "When you watch the sunrise together with the Patapons, it can be quite moving." ✱

Thanks to Andy Griffiths for additional interview help.

Crash Bandicoot 2: Cortex Strikes Back

SECOND TIME'S A CHARM

» PLAYSTATION » 1997 » NAUGHTY DOG

The game that finally sold me on the PlayStation was the original *Crash Bandicoot*. I'd been debating whether to buy one – or hold out for the Nintendo 64 – when I saw a clip of *Crash Bandicoot* playing on a TV show. It only lasted a few seconds, but it was one of the 3D into-the-screen stages and it just blew my mind. Seeing *Crash Bandicoot* for the first time was revolutionary. It was my *Super Mario 64* moment.

So I bought a PlayStation and a copy of *Crash Bandicoot* and completed it (which was not trivial – some of the later stages were brutal). And then I was so busy playing stuff like *Resident Evil*, *Tomb Raider* and *WipEout 2097* that *Crash Bandicoot 2: Cortex Strikes Back* kind of passed me by. I did play the demo, which was included on an *Official UK PlayStation Magazine* coverdisc, but I dismissed it for being more of the same. I did play and complete *Crash Bandicoot 3: Warped*, which I loved, but it wouldn't be until a few years later that I gave the second game a proper spin. Turns out I'd overlooked the best of the three.

Crash Bandicoot 2 is a masterclass in how to approach a videogame sequel. It took the rough diamond of the original and cut away the more unappealing bits. The difficulty level was smoothed out, and hubs were introduced so you didn't have to play stages in a strict linear fashion. The gameplay and level design was also polished until it gleamed. Crash was given a bunch of new moves, such as the ground slide and high jump, which made progression more fun – and tactical. Overall the game was less frustrating than the original, but it still retained its edge. Completing it 100% meant finding the five coloured gems and unlocking the two secret stages. A guide helped in this regard – as did patience, and dedication.

Crash Bandicoot 3 further refined the formula, adding more variation in stage types and giving Crash upgrades that were effectively game modifiers. It is a great game, but for me the sequel strikes the perfect balance between the aloof first game and the more affable third. You get to ride on the back of a baby polar bear too. ✱

RETRORATED

>> This month we return to the Lylat System in Star Fox, test out the latest Evercade cartridges and find out if the latest R-Type compilation has been worth the wait

» [Switch 2] If you want to get up close and personal there's a great cockpit view you can utilise.

✱PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

R-Type Tactics I • II Cosmos

I've always enjoyed the two *R-Type Tactics* games and this is a decent update over the original PSP releases.

MARTYN

Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag

This entry in the popular series passed me by previously, so I'm finally hitting the high seas and enjoying this pirates' tale.

TIM

Sleeping Dogs

Darran had been playing this and it turns out I own it, so I downloaded it again and it still holds up. It's been nine years since I last played it!

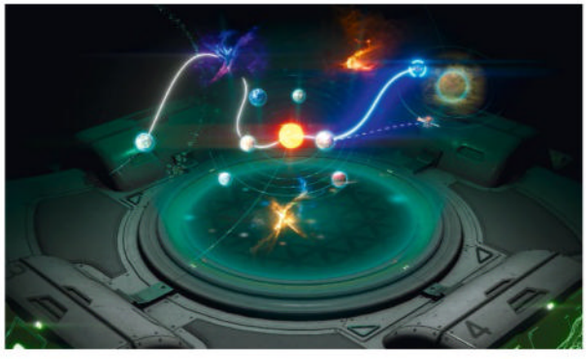
Star Fox

NINTENDO'S CLASSIC GETS A SHINY NEW REMAKE

INFORMATION

- **SYSTEM:** SWITCH 2
- **ALSO ON:** NA
- **PRICE:** £41.99 (DIGITAL), £49.99 (PHYSICAL)
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** VELAN STUDIOS
- **PLAYERS:** 1-4

Few Nintendo franchises have been as inconsistent as the *Star Fox* series. Things started off exceptionally well on the SNES and Nintendo 64, but the series has often faltered on newer tech, ranging from the decent (*Star Fox Command*), to the disappointing (*Star Fox Assault* and *Star Fox Zero*). It's perhaps no surprise then that Nintendo keeps returning to *Lylat Wars* (*Star Fox 64* in NTSC regions), arguably the highlight of the series, which is itself a remake of the original SNES classic.



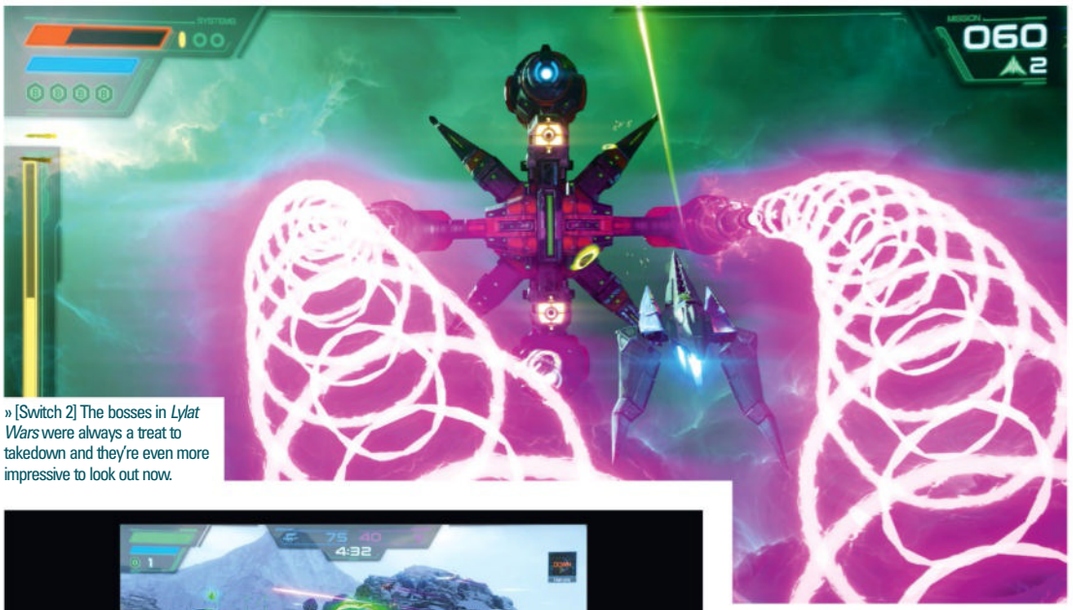
» [Switch 2] It's a lot easier to discover alternate routes in *Star Fox* now, particularly when playing its Challenge mode.

Bar some gorgeous-looking new visuals, which truly pop thanks to the clever implementation of HDR, this is ultimately the same game that came out nearly 30 years ago. Yes it looks incredible, the framerate has been dramatically improved and the cast are chattier than ever, but you won't find any new mechanics or levels hidden away in this updated Lylat System, and that's a real shame as Velan Studios clearly understands what made the original *Lylat Wars* tick and has adapted it perfectly, just as Q-Games did for its 3DS release in 2011.

If you've not played *Lylat Wars* before you're in for a treat as this is a next-level on-rails shooter with brilliant level design, a host of secret routes to discover and some genuinely awesome boss encounters and setpieces. You'll need to carefully manage your boost gauge to pull off braking, boosting and an impressive loop-the-loop, while a useful barrel roll will let you shake off enemy fire. While most levels are on-rails, a few do take place in an arena, allowing you to fly where you like (within limits of course)

BRIEF HISTORY

» The original *Star Fox* debuted in 1993 on the SNES and instantly caused a stir thanks to its 3D polygon look which was powered by the Super FX chip. It was remade in 1997 as *Lylat Wars* (*Star Fox 64* in NTSC regions) and offered significant improvements over the original game. Later games in the series have often strayed away from the standard on-rails formula of the original games and have often met with middling to good reviews, with *Star Fox 64 3D* being the most successful game of recent years.



» [Switch 2] The bosses in *Lylat Wars* were always a treat to takedown and they're even more impressive to look out now.

» [Switch 2] It's a shame *Star Fox*'s multiplayer is more focussed on customising the player avatars instead of offering more in-game content.

which certainly adds a fresh perspective to the typical linear levels. The levels themselves are now interspersed with brand-new cutscenes that flesh out both the admittedly flimsy plot and characters and I've even become used to how lifelike Fox McCloud and his crew now look. There's also a lovely little intro that takes place before the main game, which adds a little more complexity to Fox's character.

Although most of the game's stages take place in the Arwing, there are a few deviations that see you trundling across land in a Landmaster and diving into the briny depths of Aquas in a high-tech submersible. Both vehicles handle significantly differently to the Arwing, but are arguably the weakest aspect of *Star Fox*, just as they were in the original game. They're certainly a fun diversion, but it's easy to see why the original team didn't add more levels that featured them.

Thankfully, a few weaker vehicles aside, Velan Studios is working with one of the greatest N64 games of all time and while it won't take you too long to power through to your first run-in with Andross, the Lylat System is huge in scope with plenty of routes and a tremendous amount of replay value, even more so, if you hope to unlock each level's medal.

While the game features no additional stages or content outside of its many new cutscenes there are numerous upgrades to how the game can be played and generally they're all solid improvements. Mouse control is now available, which certainly takes a while to master, but works surprisingly well, while the game can now be played co-operatively with one player controlling the Arwing and the other handling firing duties.

The multiplayer has been improved over the original game's as well. In addition to the obvious online play, there are now new power-ups to try out and the option to play against bots. The only real downside here is that it all feels very bare-bones, with only three maps currently available and three different game modes available, although they do offer plenty of customisation.

By far the most significant addition to *Star Fox* is its new Challenge mode which adds plenty of replay value to an already deep game. Each stage is packed with objectives to achieve, from scoring a set amount of hits to taking down bosses in a specific way or completing stages in a certain amount of time and they'll take a good while to master. A handy side effect of this mode is that it will let you become more skilled at accessing the secret routes of the main game.

The remaining new additions to *Star Fox* feel rather throwaway and add very little to the overall package. A new Holoviewer gives you info on characters, systems and enemies as they are slowly added, while there are a wealth of cosmetic items that can be unlocked to improve your info banner. They're a nice touch but they don't really add all that much value to the game.

The biggest complaint I have with *Star Fox* is that it simply doesn't offer a lot to anyone who has played the N64 original. Despite that caveat, this is arguably the best that *Lylat Wars* has ever looked or played. I just wish there was more of it. ✱

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
LYLAT WARS (NINTENDO 64)

▼ SOMETHING NEW
STAR FOX 64 3D (3DS)

In a nutshell

It's time to finally retire the N64 classic as this new edition of the game improves on it in every way. It's only let down by Velan Studios sticking rigidly to the original and not attempting to add any new stages.

>> Score **88%**

» [Switch 2] Maybe it's just us, but this iteration of Slippy feels far less annoying than he did in the original Nintendo 64 game.

PICK OF THE MONTH

R-Type Tactics I•II Cosmos

IT'S R-TYPE, BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT

INFORMATION

- **FORMAT:** PLAYSTATION 5
- **ALSO ON:** PLAYSTATION 4, SWITCH, SWITCH 2, PC, XBOX SERIES S/X
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £41.99+ (DIGITAL), £49.99 (PHYSICAL)
- **PUBLISHER:** NIS AMERICA
- **DEVELOPER:** GRANZELLA
- **PLAYERS:** 1

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
XCOM: ENEMY UNKNOWN (PC)

▼ SOMETHING NEW
FRONT MISSION 2: REMAKE (PLAYSTATION 5)

BRIEF HISTORY

» *R-Type Tactics* (known as *R-Type Command* in North America) was released exclusively for the PSP handheld in 2007. It was successful enough for Irem to develop a sequel, *R-Type Tactics II: Operation Bitter Chocolate*, that arrived two years later – but only in Japan.

GO DEEPER

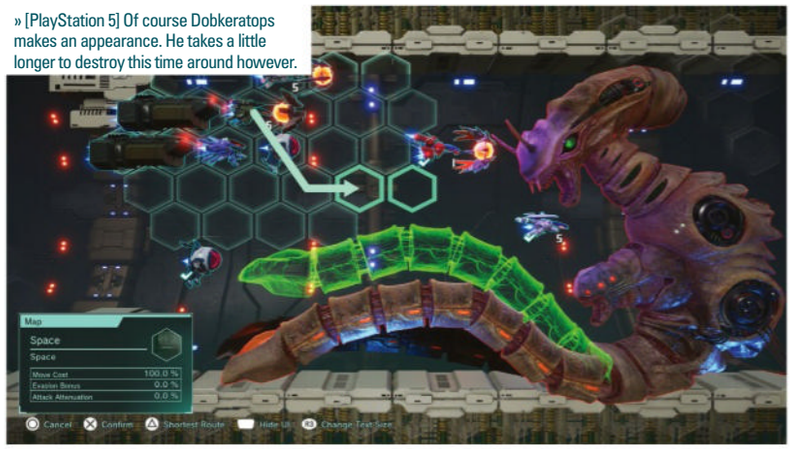
The facts behind R-Type Tactics I•II Cosmos

» The collection was initially announced in 2022 for a summer 2023 release. The date slipped several times, with it finally arriving internationally in June 2026.

» Aside from the digital release, the game is also available as a physical boxed copy for the PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5 and Switch. A special limited edition is also available for these formats, which comes in a collector's box containing the game, soundtrack CD, art card set and other gubbins.

You do have to wonder how *R-Type Tactics* came to pass. How do you go from a series of horizontal shooters that traditionally feature a lone pilot going up against an alien armada, to a turn-based tactical RPG where you slowly and methodically outwit the opposition within a certain number of moves? Beats us, although there are clues. When you finish the original *R-Type*, your R-9 ship is joined by a fleet of other R-9s in a victory flyby. Then in *R-Type Final*, you get to choose from 101 playable ships. The classic tagline was always "Blast off and strike the evil Bydo empire" but it appears Irem always had plans to extend the *R-Type* universe beyond the simple 'us versus them' scenario established in the core series.

So we arrived at *R-Type Tactics*, released exclusively for the Sony PSP in 2007. A sequel, *R-Type Tactics II: Operation Bitter Chocolate* (no… no idea), arrived two years later, also for the PSP, but it was never released outside of Japan. The *Cosmos* collection brings together the first two games, now freed from the confines of the PSP. So that means a fully localised version of the Japanese sequel for the very first time, along with a brand-new bonus chapter that serves as an epilogue to the story. For fans of the originals, this release ticks a bunch of boxes. For everyone else, you should perhaps proceed with caution.



» [PlayStation 5] Of course Dobkeratops makes an appearance. He takes a little longer to destroy this time around however.

The original *Tactics* dropped you straight into the thick of it, with barely any handholding. The new version is happy to do the same. You're given access to a few text docs, and there are handy on-screen tooltips, but basically you're on your own. This naturally leads to some frustration during the early missions, as you work out winning strategies through trial and error. Be prepared to spend 45 minutes losing a mission. Modern updates are often guilty of going too far when it comes to onboarding players, but some form of interactive tutorial would have been helpful here.

This release is clearly aimed at *Tactics* fans, which makes the decision to lock away the second game and the new epilogue all the more baffling. For those waiting to play the sequel since its Western non-arrival in 2009, you'll have to spend a good few hours completing the first game in order to unlock it. It is worth the effort, as the sequel's story is really solid, dropping a third warring faction into the mix and featuring branching mission paths through the game. The fact that the story is now voice-narrated really helps to emphasise its beats. As you'd expect, the graphics have also been suitably enhanced, bringing the units and the playfields to life. And this is where the appeal lies. It's not some random tactical game with a generic sci-fi setting, it's *R-Type* and that means ships, locations, enemies and lore that players know so well. That carries weight and adds greatly to the overall experience, regardless of the genre.

» [PlayStation 5] The part-submerged second stage from the *R-Type II* coin-op makes for an interesting battleground.

» [PlayStation 5] It's important to defend your flagship vessel from enemy attack. It's the backbone of your fleet.

In a nutshell

A worthy remake collection for fans of the series and tactical games in general. The new chapter is appreciated – although it's a slog to unlock it.

>> **Score 72%**

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PICK OF THE MONTH

Lego Sega Mega Drive Console

» **Buy it for:** £34.95 » **Buy it from:** lego.com/en-gb

Sega's Mega Drive is easily its most popular console, spawning *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Gunstar Heroes* and countless other iconic games. As a big fan of the system, I'm delighted to see it has finally been immortalised in Lego form.

When you consider the price of this new build it's surprisingly good value, particularly when placed next to the recent Game Boy release, which came with 58 fewer pieces, but costs nearly an extra £20. Having said that, the engineering of the Game Boy is significantly better than what's on offer here, although that's more down to the chunkiness of Nintendo's original console, rather than a poor effort on Lego's part.

It's very hard to emulate curves with Lego. Still, this is a decent attempt, with the machine's side grill and general shape well captured. Sadly, the pads are less impressive, missing their Start buttons and just looking a little too bulky.

And yet there's a lot to enjoy with this simple build. Spread across four bags, the first three concentrate on the console itself and include a hidden image of Sonic's face under the Mega Drive's hood. You can also switch between Mega Drive and Genesis builds, although it does require a fair bit of fiddly piece swapping. The final bag includes a tiny *Sonic 2* game cartridge as well as the two joypads and their respective leads.

The build itself is very straightforward and doesn't really require any technical knowledge at all during construction. The instructions across the 84-page manual are extremely easy to follow and it's also compatible with the Lego Builder app.

The pads let it down somewhat and it's a shame it couldn't come with a few additional carts, but there's no denying that this is a nice build, particularly if you loved Sega's Mega Drive. Just be mindful that it's nowhere near as sleek-looking as the classic console it's based on.

» It took us around 80 minutes to build Lego's Mega Drive, not bad for a 479-piece build.

» This is a deceptively tiny build, with the console measuring just 6-inches wide by 4.5-inches deep.

Evercade: NeoGeo Arcade 4

» **System:** Evercade family » **Buy it for:** £19.99
» **Buy it from:** Online, retail

The fourth NeoGeo cartridge is another that offers good variety, despite only including eight games. *Blazing Star* is the absolute highlight here, offering intense shmup action, but *The King Of Fighters 2002* and *Fatal Fury Special* are also great inclusions. *Robo Army* is a decent side-scrolling brawler, *Baseball Stars 2* is good and *Metal Slug 4*, despite being far weaker than earlier games in the series, is still a solid blaster. That leaves *3 Count Bout* and *King Of The Monsters*, which are the weakest games on offer, but are still fun when playing with a friend. Due to the two-player focussed nature of the games, this cartridge fares better on the VS than it does on the Alpha and EXP, so keep that in mind.

DARRAN JONES

» **Score 80%**

Devil May Cry 5: Devil Hunter Edition

» **System:** Switch 2 » **Buy it for:** £34.99
» **Buy it from:** Online, retail

Making its debut on the Switch 2 is Capcom's demon-juggling classic *Devil May Cry 5*. The word classic is justified, as the game originally came out in 2019 and it still holds up exceptionally well. It's a blast, basically. This edition runs at a steady 60fps in both docked and handheld modes, and features the wealth of bonus DLC that's been released in the meantime – the highlight being the introduction of Vergil, joining the original trio of Dante, Nero and V. Sadly, the performance-based modes introduced in the 2020 *Special Edition* are missing. It would have been nice to see a few Switch 2 exclusive extras to make up for their omission.

MARTYN CARROLL

» **Score 87%**

Evercade: Activision Collection 3

» **System:** Evercade family » **Buy it for:** £19.99
» **Buy it from:** Online, retail

When it comes to sheer variety, Evercade's third Activision cart certainly impresses. Unfortunately, it's also the weakest offering, with the lowest amount of games and the poorest quality across them. We've had good fun with *Barnstorming*, *Dragonfire*, *Kaboom!*, *Keystone Kapers* and *The Activision Decathlon*, and they all hold up well. However, the rest of the included games range from poor (*Bridge*, *Thwocker*, *Kabobber*) to just OK (*Dolphin*, *Ice Hockey*, *Pressure Cooker*, *Chopper Command* and *Laser Blast*). It's likely that you won't be playing this as much as the previous two Activision collections.

DARRAN JONES

» **Score 70%**

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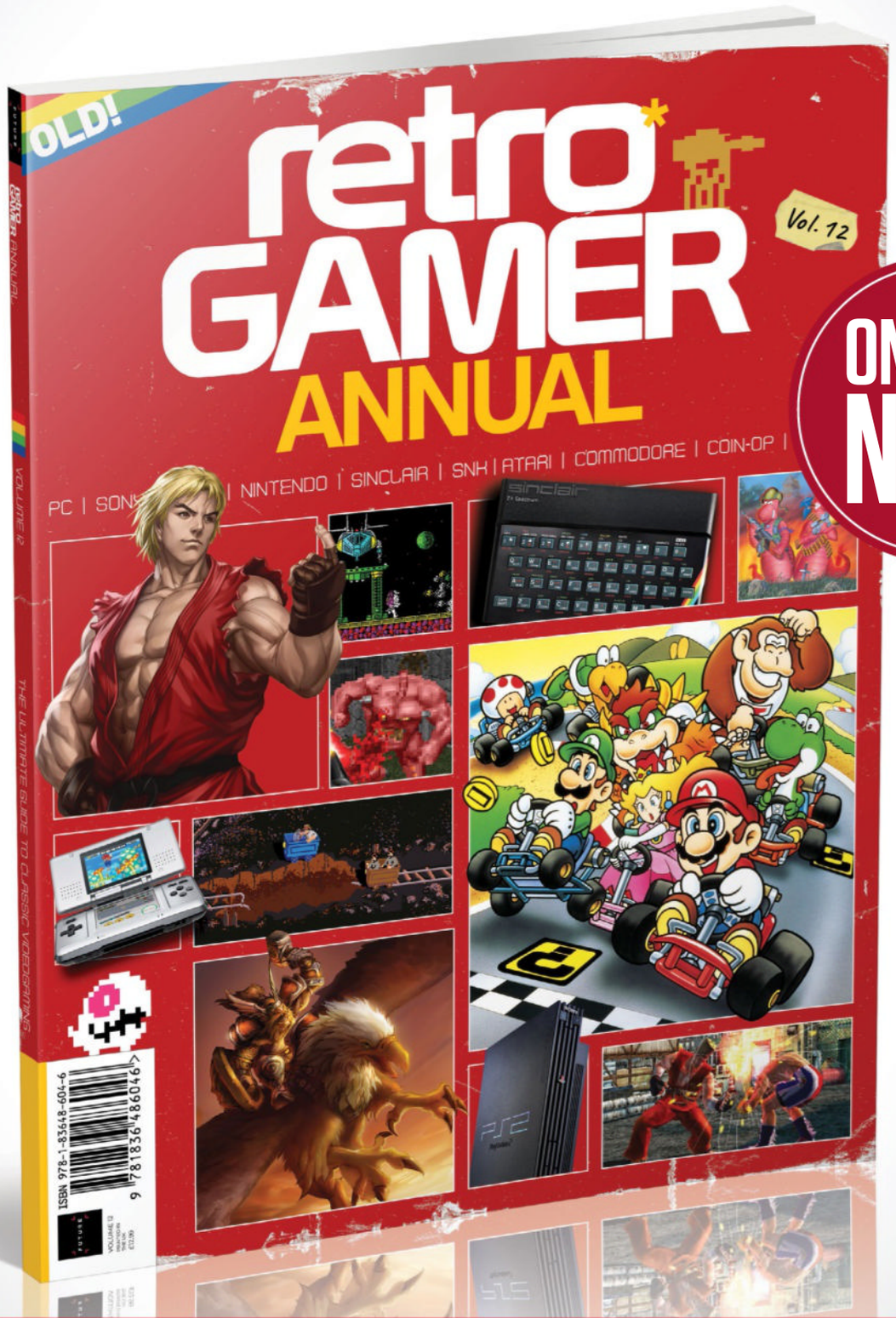

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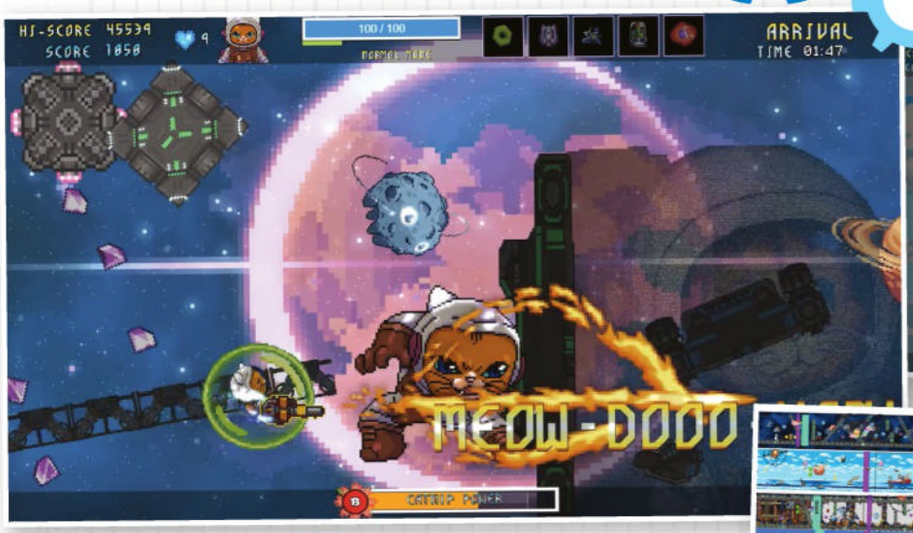
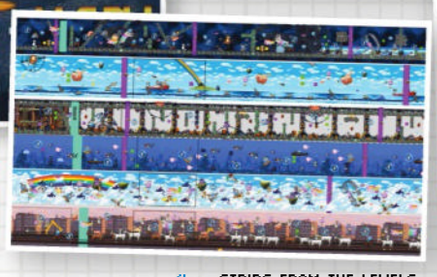




<!--- [PC] ASTRO PERFORMING A MEOW-DOKEN. --->

<!--- STRIPS FROM THE LEVELS BEING DESIGNED, WITH KEY ENEMIES PLACED. --->

<!--- EARLY SKETCHES FROM TAQ YONEDA. --->

<INTRO> DEREK BREWSTER'S RETRO GAME DEV BOOKS HAVE FEATURED IN PREVIOUS HOMEBREW COLUMNS, BUT NOW THERE IS A NEW WAY TO LEARN. USING THE QUEST VR HEADSET, ENTER AN EIGHTIES BEDROOM AND LEARN TO CODE A C64 GAME, WITH FUTURE UPDATES TO COVER THE NES AND GAME BOY. IT'S CURRENTLY £9.99 IN EARLY ACCESS AND CAN EXPORT YOUR CREATIONS TO REAL HARDWARE (BIT.LY/RETROGAMEDEV-QUEST). MAYBE YOUR CREATION COULD BE FEATURED HERE IN FUTURE ISSUES... </INTRO>

<MAIN HEADER>

COOL FOR CATS

<INTRO> HASRAF 'HAZ' DULULL IS UNLEASHING ASTRO BURN, A CUTE SHOOT-'EM-UP STARRING A CAT WITH CRAZY SPECIAL MOVES </INTRO>

<BODY> **After many years working on visual FX for cinema, Hasraf 'HaZ' Dulull decided to become a developer of indie games.** He didn't have to look very far when he was coming up with new games ideas, with his own cat provided the inspiration for his brand-new game. "I was staring at the SNES cartridges of *R-Type* and *Axelay* when Mia tapped my arm for food," reveals HaZ. "I thought, 'What if the pilot of the game was a space cat?' I drew inspiration from *Parodius Da!* and *Pop'n TwinBee*, while cult classics like *Cotton*, *Harmful Park* and *Keio Flying Squadron* influenced the surreal, colourful world."

In this horizontally scrolling shmup, Astro is accompanied by her robot friend and can build up her Catnip Power Bar. "I wanted to move away from the standard projectiles and create something with much more personality," HaZ continues. "The signature move is the Meow-doken, where Astro transforms to wipe the entire screen in one gloriously unhinged moment. There are eight unique power moves, and they are randomised, blending tight arcade foundations with over-the-top fighting-game energy."

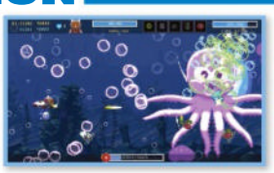
The demo for *Astro Burn* emerged in just two months, thanks to Haz deciding to use GDevelop. "I needed an environment that was light, intuitive, and empowering," he explains. "I started development in March 2025 entirely on my own, using placeholder graphics and wireframe menus. I was

ASTRO ACTION

<INTRO> WHAT TO EXPECT IN HAZ'S NEW GAME </INTRO>

GAME MODES

<As well as two-player co-op and four difficulty settings, the Story Mode has cutscenes, while Arcade Mode just provides intense action. />



BOSS FIGHTS

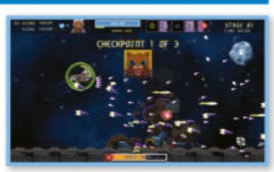
<You'll be pleased to hear that a variety of wild and wacky bosses feature in *Astro Burn*. Highlights, include this rather magnificent octopus. />

FUN DIALOGUE

<*Astro Burn*'s Story Mode is full of cutscenes that depict your hero's surreal journey. As you'd expect, they're filled with plenty of cat-related puns. />

COOL WEAPONS

<As well as numerous special moves, Astro can equip a number of useful weapon upgrades that give stronger firepower while they last. />

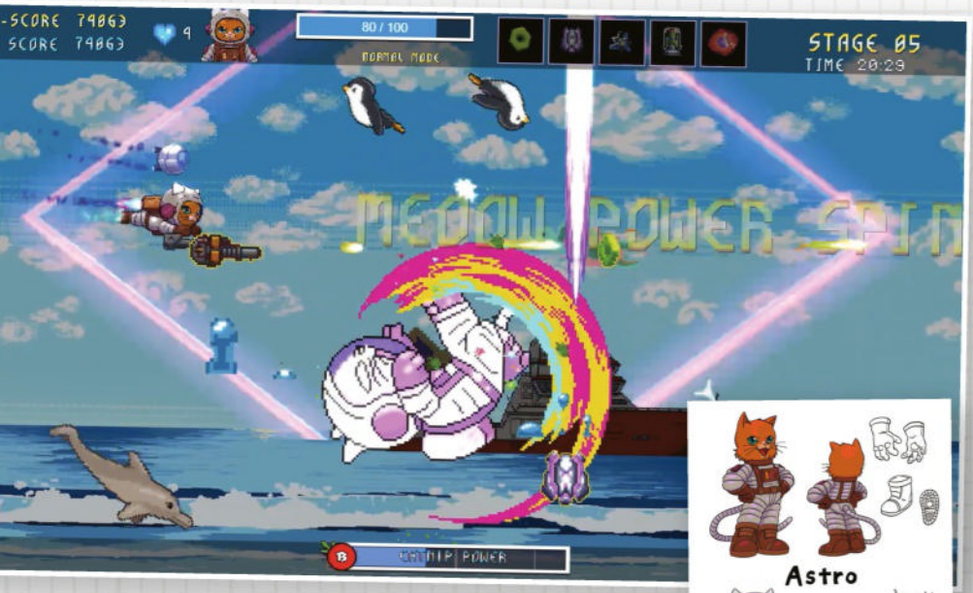


HANDY CHECKPOINTS

<Checkpoints in each level help space out difficult sections, letting Astro restart there. *Astro Burn* can be quite challenging, so they're very welcome. />

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**



<!--- [PC] AMONG THE ALTERNATIVE POWER MOVES IS THIS POWER SPIN KICK. --->

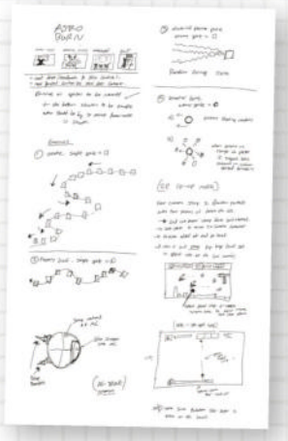
speaking at an event in Winnipeg, and I met Taq (Q) Yoneda, a Japanese-Canadian artist." That meeting proofed fortuitous indeed, with Haz telling us, "He sent me some fan art, and it was the exact Nineties Konami vibe I had in my head."

That meeting meant a big overhaul of the game's look. "I replaced harsh sci-fi explosions with fireworks, rainbows, hearts and bells; a technical challenge was ensuring these vibrant effects didn't obscure the bullet patterns," explains HaZ. "I collaborated with my Paris-based friend Roman, who creates music under the name Venice Bleach. The score is a banging synth-wave soundtrack blended with Nineties drum & bass, funky textures, and a few well-placed meows. For the Meow-doken SFX, Roman had this genius idea of using this toy he got from Japan; he got me recording all kinds of cat sounds (the things I would do to make a game!) The analogue lo-fi way of capturing this was just so cool! We are releasing the soundtrack on cassette, CD and vinyl."

Thanks to publishers Pixel Doors and 33 Games, the game's Kickstarter included a unique physical version. "I really missed the days when buying a game was a full tactile experience. We weren't just selling a game; we were offering a DRM-free experience on a custom USB cartridge that requires no internet or logins." So could we see more of Astro in future? "We are porting *Astro Burn* to mobile; we are in talks for consoles, but there are technical hurdles. I'm keen on collabs with Astro featured in other indie games. I would love someone to demake *Astro Burn* for the Game Boy!"

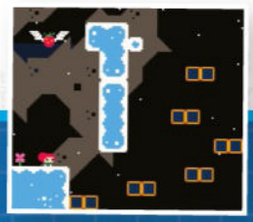
In our mind, you can never have too many cats in videogames, and *Astro Burn* gives us strong *Aqua City* vibes, which features another feline who loves to shoot down enemies. *Astro Burn* is looking very fun so far and a review will be incoming. An Early Access demo is on Steam at bit.ly/astroburn-demo, while the Kickstarter is at bit.ly/astroburn-ks </BODY>

<!--- CONCEPT ART OF THE MAIN CHARACTER ASTRO IN HER CUTE SPACESUIT. --->



<!--- DESIGN NOTES FROM HAZ AT AN EARLY STAGE. --->

<!--- HASRAF 'HAZ' DULULL WITH THE RETRO-STYLED USB ASTRO BURN CARTRIDGE AND BOX. --->



<!--- [SNES] COLLECT THAT FLYING STRAWBERRY BEFORE IT LEAVES THE SCREEN TO HELP CELESTE'S DANGEROUS MOUNTAIN CLIMB. --->

<!--- [NEO GEO POCKET COLOR] HORATIO MUST CROSS BUSY ROADS AND OTHER HAZARDS BEFORE HE CAN SNOWBOARD. --->

NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

<**Amiga:** Collect orbs and dodge enemy fire to survive 20 levels in Dion Guy's *Railblaze* (for any Amiga, 1MB RAM). Get dodging at bit.ly/railblaze-amiga />

<**BBC Micro:** Following his work on *Skool Daze* (wrongly attributed to Rob Cameron in **RG** 286), Rob Coleman has converted *Pentagram* to the BBC Master. Find it at bit.ly/pentagram-bbcmaster />

<**Game Boy:** Squish the bugs and don't get smooshed by the moving walls in Mike Daw's puzzle game *Smoosh* (for DMG or Color and Super Game Boy support). Get squishing at bit.ly/smoosh-gb />

<**MSX:** *3Kings – Three Kingdoms* is Gen Hasegawa's tactical war game, inspired by classic Koei titles, for MSX1 or 2 (64K memory needed). Plan your move by visiting bit.ly/3kings-msx />

<**Neo Geo Pocket Color:** *Horatio Goes Snowboarding* hits the slopes courtesy of Chris Ahchay and Infinite States (see **RG** 286), with physical cartridges available. Slalom over to bit.ly/horatio-ngpc />

<**PET:** *Pengy* from Youki is a brilliant adaptation of *Pengo*, requiring 32K of memory. Waddle on over to bit.ly/pengy-pet />

<**Plus/4:** Make decisions and shape your life's progress in *Crazy Thing Called Life* by Chris Snowden. It's at bit.ly/crazything-plus4 />

<**SNES:** Philip May's impressive *Celeste* demake for the 16-bit console has been released, with a NES version under development. Get leaping (and dying) at bit.ly/celeste-snes />

<**Spectrum Next:** Check out Dave Douglas' conversion of the Master System's *Sonic The Hedgehog*. Go fast to bit.ly/sonic-next />

<**VIC-20:** *Mr Lee* from Aitsch recreates the classic *Bruce Lee* gameplay on an unexpanded VIC. Karate chop your way to bit.ly/mrlee-vic20 />

<**ZX Spectrum:** *Shadow Fields* is an impressive horizontally scrolling shmup for 128K machines. Blast on over to bit.ly/shadowfields-zx />

CHAMPION CODER

MEICHNPP

<INTRO> AFTER OWNING AN MSX2+ SINCE 1989, MEICHNPP HAS RECENTLY BEEN CREATING CUTE MSX GAMES </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: JAPAN WEBSITE: PIGMHALL.ITCH.IO FORMAT: MSX PREVIOUS GAME: ECHOES OF THE QUIET WORLD, ECHOHEART EXPLORER, ROOMY GLOOMY />

<!--- MEICHNPP IS A BIG FAN OF THE MSX AND SPECIALISES IN CUTE-LOOKING GAMES. --->

WHAT IS YOUR DEVELOPMENT ENVIRONMENT LIKE?

I use a custom Windows-based integrated development tool I created called Tabmegx, which combines a text editor and tile editor optimised for the MSX screen size. For debugging, I primarily use openMSX. When working with a team, we share game text and event data via Google Sheets, automatically compile it on the web, and can instantly test it in a browser-based MSX emulator. Creating games that run on 1980s hardware using 2020s tools is personally one of the most enjoyable parts of the process for me.

DO YOU HAVE A FRAMEWORK THAT YOU LIKE TO REUSE?

I've built a collection of Z80 assembly libraries over the years that handle scrolling, character management, music drivers, compression routines and other commonly used functions. I've made them publicly available on the web.

HOW DO YOU PRODUCE GRAPHICS AND SOUND FOR YOUR GAMES?

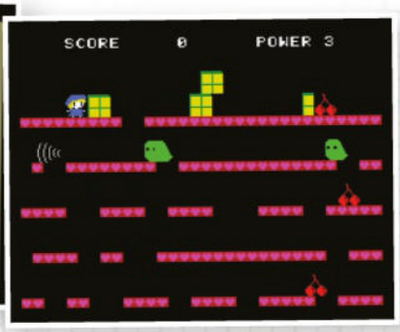
I usually start by sketching rough ideas on paper. Once I've solidified the image, I scan it, then import it into Photoshop, where I adjust it to the MSX colour palette and refine it dot by dot. Lately, I've been enjoying the challenge of deliberately working within MSX limitations, using only 16 colours. For sound, I compose using Excel, export to MML, and optimise it for the MSX sound chips (PSG and FM). The restrictions often force you to create melodies that are more memorable.

WHAT ARE YOU PLANNING TO DO NEXT?

I'd love to make a proper open-world RPG on the MSX, with massive map data, branching scenarios, and tons of hidden secrets, seeing how much world I could pack into 4MB or 8MB of RAM. I don't have a large-scale project underway. Instead, I'm planning several smaller to mid-sized games that aim to strongly stimulate the player's imagination using simple screens. If I ever find the right theme, I would give the MSXdev competition a try. One of my dreams is to create at least one game for another retro platform. />

<!--- [MSX] ECHOHEART EXPLORER ALLOWS YOU TO 'THROW' YOUR HEART, PRESSING FIRE TO CHANGE ITS ANGLE OF MOVEMENT. --->

<!--- [MSX2] ACTION RPG ECHOES OF THE QUIET WORLD IS SET IN A FUTURE WHERE AI DOMINATES THE WORLD, WITH TEXT IN ENGLISH AND JAPANESE. --->



<!--- [MSX] IN ROOMY GLOOMY, YOU MUST COLLECT THE FRUIT AND DODGE THE GHOSTS AS THE PLATFORMS SCROLL. --->

DATA BURST

RETURN TO BLACKTOOTH: A HEAD OVER HEELS ADVENTURE

<INFO FORMAT: AMIGA (1MB) AND ATARI ST (1MB MINIMUM, STE ENHANCED SOUND) CREDITS: THALAMUS INTERACTIVE (COLIN PORCH, HOFFMAN, JOCHEN FELDKOTTER, ANDY ROBERTS) PRICE: $12.99 (DIGITAL DOWNLOAD) / PHYSICAL EDITION TBC WEB: THALAMUS.LINK/RTB-AMIGA / THALAMUS.LINK/RTB-ATARIST />

<BODY> **In this Atari-authorised sequel, Colin Porch takes us to the Blacktooth Empire 30 years later, with the Emperor's son in control of the five planets (Blacktooth, Egyptus, Safari, Book World and Penitentiary).** Head and Heels are locked up in separate cells once more. Head can jump and glide and shoot doughnuts (with his trusty Hooter), while Heels can run faster and carry and stack objects (after finding his Bag) and combined they are formidable. The pair must liberate the five crowns, defeat the fearsome Guardian and topple the new Emperor. The familiar isometric view returns, with lovely background details and brilliant animation. While the layout of early rooms will seem familiar to veterans, there are plenty of new traps (the forcefield deactivated by hitting the Flusher switches, the coloured Keys needed to open locks, and blocks/platforms that become invisible) and familiar features (the Charlie droid you can move with the giant Buttons to help you across deadly floors, or the Hush Puppies that only act as a staircase for Heels). The life transfer, when one character runs out, is a clever addition. There is a great Ste Pickford loading screen based on Wil Overton's cover artwork, excellent music and sounds, and four difficulty settings. On both formats, this is a standout title and a challenging sequel. Don't miss it! </BODY>

SCORE: 91%

<!--- [ATARI ST] HEELS MUST USE THE BUTTON TO CAREFULLY STEER THE DROID AND DROP THE BAG IN THE RIGHT PLACE. --->

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

<!--- [AMSTRAD CPC] THIS DRAGON IS SLEEPING, SO MAYBE LOOK FOR ANOTHER ROUTE PAST IT. --->

<!--- [AMSTRAD CPC] MAGIC IS NEEDED TO GET PAST THIS EARLY BOSS, SERPENTA. --->

CASTLE ADVENTURE

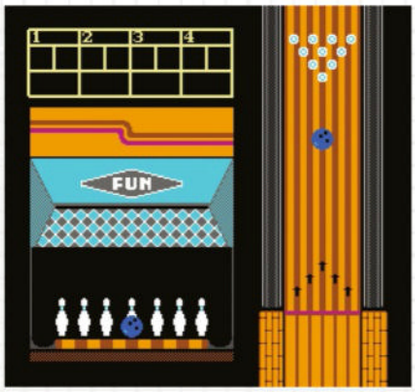
<INFO FORMAT: AMSTRAD CPC (128K, 2-BUTTON JOYSTICK) CREDITS: EASTER EGG (CARL-STEPHANE BERQUEZ, BRUNO MORALES, RICHARD GATINEAU) PRICE: TBC (PHYSICAL EDITION WITH USB STICK) WEB: YOGTZE.FR />

<BODY> **In 13th-century Europe, the disappearance of women from local villages is blamed on the witch, Raven.** Val Beaumont heads to Raven's castle, only to be stripped of her equipment (boots, breastplate, and trusty morning star). Val must now recover said equipment and collect powerful magic spells to fend off the witch's sinister creations.

This *Castlevania*-inspired game has a distinctive palette, well-drawn backgrounds, and an atmospheric soundtrack. A great map of the castle is shown in-game; doors take you to other parts of the castle, while levers activate various mechanisms. Chests can contain treasures or potions (those marked with S act as save points, giving the password to continue play). The difficulty level is certainly high, but this remains a great Amstrad experience. </BODY>

SCORE: 85%

<!--- [NES] DIALOGUE APPEARS IN THE SPEECH BUBBLE, WITH A PORTRAIT OF WHO IS TALKING. --->



<!--- [NES] THE BOWLING MINIGAME IS GREAT FUN, AND THERE ARE OTHER MINIGAMES TO BE DISCOVERED. --->

BEYOND THE PINS: THE SECOND FRAME

<INFO FORMAT: NES (REVIEWED), MS-DOS, MAC, PC CREDITS: KHAN GAMES (JON FIORNACK, KEVIN HANLEY, THOMAS CIPOLLONE) PRICE: TBC (PROJECTED $10 DIGITAL / $60 NES CARTRIDGE / $100 MS-DOS BIG BOX) WEB: KHANGAMES.COM / KHANGAMES.ITCH.IO/ />

<BODY> **In this clever point-and-click, a bowling alley employee tries to get things ready for a major tournament after a kitchen fire (in the original game jam entry).** You must post flyers, test lane 4 (after retrieving your ball from your locker), and persuade the cook, Martha, to come back. Important objects are highlighted, reducing the need to pixel hunt, and the inventory is easily accessible. With a great soundtrack, fun minigames (including bowling), three possible endings and a brilliant second-act twist, this well-produced game has a great sense of humour. </BODY>

SCORE: 88%

PROCESSING

<INTRO> MARTIN CREMERIUS-GAUER OF 2ND LAW GAMES IS DEVELOPING A PINBALL TITLE FOR THE GAME BOY COLOR </INTRO>

<BODY> **Martin's new game is actually connected to an earlier one.** "*Self Simulated: Pinball Anomaly* is a spin-off of my precision platformer, *Self Simulated*, with inspiration from *Pokémon Pinball*, *Super Robot Pinball* and *Devil's Crush*, plus real-world tables like *Medieval Madness* and *Attack From Mars*."

Unlike many pinball games, Martin's has something of a story behind it as well. "The corrupted AI 'M-Iss1-NgN-0' has trapped Self, the robotic protagonist, inside a glitching digital simulation," we're told. "The player must fight through waves of enemy robots, survive boss encounters, and use the table itself to rescue Self and shut down M-Iss1-NgN-0."

Developed in GB Studio, it uses a custom engine built on top of Mico27's open-source GBS Pinball Template. Music and sound are by Beatscribe, with pixel-art support from 2bitcrook. "Key features include plunger skill shots, ball saves, enemy waves and boss fights integrated into the table, a nudge system and minigame flipper rooms," Martin says. "There's rumble support, save and resume during a run, and assist settings for tailoring the difficulty. I'm planning a Kickstarter campaign for the digital launch, but I'll eventually do a physical release (with the help of a publisher)." </BODY>

<!--- [GAME BOY COLOR] THESE SPIDER-LIKE ROBOTS MUST BE DEFEATED BY USING THE BALL.. --->

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

CODEMASTERS MEMORIES

The team reflects on 40 years of the popular UK studio

DARRAN JONES

MARTYN CARROLL

TIM EMPEY

We've been talking about Codemasters a lot lately as we planned out this issue's celebratory cover feature. From its early days as a successful budget label, through to its current position as a developer of distinguished racing games, the studio triggers plenty of memories.

DARRAN

Were you introduced to Codemasters via its range of budget games?

MARTYN

Absolutely. The first one I played would have been *BMX Simulator*, which was great value for £1.99. I played that a lot, especially with mates in two-player mode. Then came the *Dizzy* games from the Oliver twins. I owned all of those. I bet you had the *Dizzy* games on your Amstrad CPC Darran?

DARRAN

All the *Dizzy* games, even the naff spin-offs like *Dizzy Down The Rapids*.

TIM

I'm not sure what happened, but I didn't get any of the budget games. My shelves were lined with Mastertronic games, but not Codemasters. Maybe there was an embargo in Northern Ireland. As for *Dizzy*? Well, I had a quick go round a friend's house, but I hated the slow speed of it and Dizzy's floaty jump.

MARTYN

That jump always ended with you getting accidentally fried by a flame or something. My favourite of them was *Fantasy World Dizzy*.

DARRAN

That is absolutely shocking to hear, Tim! Did anyone else get suckered in by the bold claims on the packaging? I certainly did.

MARTYN

Yeah, not sure how right and proper it was to have someone who actually owned the company claiming that every single one of its games was, "ABSOLUTELY BRILLIANT!!"

» Codemasters often innovated. This CD pack contains 30 games and each one loaded in as little as 20 seconds.

DARRAN

It clearly worked for them. Oh, and I agree about *Fantasy World Dizzy*. Great game. Before we move onto the console stuff, does anyone remember that ambitious CD?

TIM

No, what's that?

MARTYN

I remember it. It was really quite clever. Codemasters stuck 30 games on an audio CD which you placed in a normal CD player. You then connected that to your computer using a special lead and you selected the game you wanted to load like you would a music track. The games loaded really quickly. I recall the technology was a bit flaky, you had to wiggle the wire a bit to get it working. The complete pack goes for silly money these days. I imagine Codemasters only sold a few of them.

DARRAN

I remember waiting ages for my local computer shop to get it in stock for the Amstrad and it never did. I'd loved to have

» [ZX Spectrum] Dizzy was everywhere in the early Nineties. Do you remember the questionable spin-offs like *Dizzy Down The Rapids*?

owned it at the time. So who enjoyed *Micro Machines*? That was huge for Codemasters.

MARTYN

I loved the *Micro Machines* games, they were great on the Amiga and Mega Drive. They really nailed it with *V3* on the PlayStation. You could plug in two Multitaps and have up to eight players.

TIM

Who didn't enjoy *Micro Machines*? The J-Cart on the Mega Drive sequel was pretty innovative at the time. Much later the *Play* magazine team used to have lunchtime sessions on *V4*, until we got told to shut up by the rest of the office.

DARRAN

Colin McRae Rally was a massive success for the

» [PC] Did you have a smashing time playing the *TOCA* games? The series was noted for its more serious, sim approach.

» [ZX Spectrum] For Darran and Martyn, the Dizzy series peaked with the third entry, *Fantasy World Dizzy*.

» [PlayStation] The original *Colin McRae Rally* was a firm favourite with racing fans and spawned a long-running series.

Codies as well. I'm sure we all experienced that series and *TOCA*, which I couldn't personally get on with.

MARTYN

Colin McRae was a great game, probably the closest thing to *Sega Rally* on the PS1. I preferred it over *V-Rally*. *TOCA* was more simulation-focussed wasn't it?

TIM

I reviewed *TOCA Race Driver 3* for *Play*. Yeah it was more of a simulation, but it actually had a story mode where you'd get berated by a gruff Scottish driving coach, and run off the track by your rival.

MARTYN

I do have a random Codies memory from this era. In the late-Nineties I was working in a video shop that also hired out PlayStation games. The manager knew I played games and asked me to suggest some new titles to buy in. I was thinking about broadening our range, so I suggested *Music*. Turns out a music sequencer wasn't hot rental material. It was hired out a grand total of zero times.

» [PC] Codemasters is best known for its licensed *Formula 1* games these days.

> "The J-Cart on the Mega Drive sequel was pretty innovative at the time"
>
> **TIM EMPEY**

DARRAN

Did anyone have much experience with the later *F1* games? I've got a couple via PC giveaways, but never actually played one.

MARTYN

My son plays the recent *F1* games a lot with his friends online. He loves them. I've had a go and they were enjoyable, and not as fussy as I thought they would be.

TIM

Nah, I crashed on the first corner and a wheel fell off. And that was with all the assists turned on.

MARTYN

Rookie error!

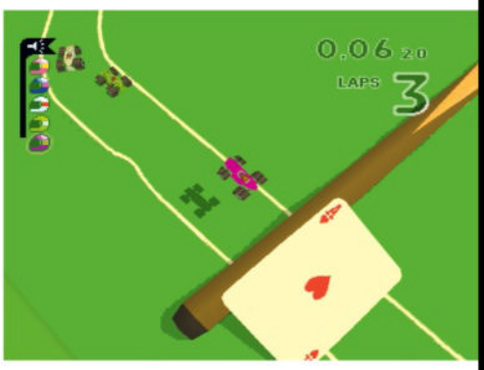
DARRAN

Well EA certainly likes them as it now owns Codemasters. Here's hoping we get a AAA remake of *Dizzy* in the coming years. I'd certainly buy it.

MARTYN

Me too, but only if it's made by the Oliver twins…

» [Amstrad CPC] *BMX Simulator* was Codies' first game and its first smash hit. It topped the budget chart for months in 1986.



» [PlayStation] When it came to multiplayer racing fun, few titles could top the mighty *Micro Machines V3*.

READERS REACT

You select your favourite games by the Codies

VirtuaCritic
Brian Lara Cricket '96. Still the best videogame adaptation of the sport.

Mark
Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament. The J-Cart four-player mode was rarely used but always loved. Easily one of the best Mega Drive racers.

Dejan Pantic
Second Sight, an underrated shooter/stealth game that managed to make the psychic powers setting fun and engaging.

Martin Dewar
The *Dizzy* and *Micro Machines* games are always right up there, but I also had a soft spot for *ATV Simulator* on the Amstrad back in the day.

Decon Theed
Psycho Pinball (specifically, the Mega Drive version) remains one of the best digital pinball games ever made, with solid ball physics, fun table layouts, colourful and well-drawn graphics and tons of charm.

Andynick42
It's weird that my first thought was *CJ's Elephant Antics* on C64. I guess I still think of Codemasters as an 8-bit budget games publisher. I probably played *Dirt 2* and *3* the most though once you remove the rose-tinted glasses.

chalkitdown
My mind always goes to *TOCA* on the PS1 when I think of Codemasters. I remember being blown away at the CPU cars avoiding crashes in front of them. At a time when other racers would have their CPUs just plough straight through.

megadirt.bsky.social
I'd love to say any of the *Dizzy* games, but the actual answer is *Micro Machines 2*. The first time I saw that Mega Drive cart with the extra controller inputs built-in blew my mind apart.

Whirlwound
F1 Race Stars. Fun little karter with bags of charm in its courses and music – characters are OK for the most part (Valtteri Bottas with his granite chin was my pick).

Omelette Coleman
Advanced Ski Simulator. It accurately simulates how quickly I would fall over if I ever tried to ski.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

SONIC ADVENTURE 2 BIRTHDAY PACK

"I imported this from Japan. I love this set, it really makes me wish they would release more *Sonic* collector editions like this in the US."

AMOUNT PAID: $30

SAKURA WARS PS4 BOX SET

"This was imported from Japan. This box set is probably one of the best Collector's Editions I've ever purchased, as it has pretty much all of the soundtracks from all of the main games up until this one."

AMOUNT PAID: $130

A CERTAIN MAGICAL VIRTUAL ON PS VITA BOX SET

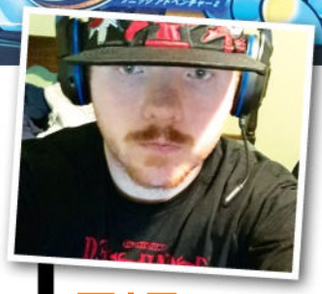
"This is another standout box set, as I feel like there really isn't anything like this for *Virtual On*, even the more recent *Virtual On* collection for the PS4 was relegated to digital only."

AMOUNT PAID: $80

THE SEGA FAMILY

How a close family bond started a collecting journey with Sega

Words by Faith Johnson



BIO

NAME:
Trevor Craig

LOCATION:
Indiana, United States

ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
$5,000

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Genesis

FAVOURITE GAME:
Sonic The Hedgehog 3

SOCIAL MEDIA:
@SegaOutcast

Trevor Craig's journey with retro gaming started with his family, who were also big gamers.

"I discovered gaming through my older uncles, who were more like older brothers as they were close to my age," he begins. "Growing up, I spent a lot of time at my grandmother's, where we played the Genesis and SNES, so I got the opportunity to experience both at a young age. Playing the Genesis, and ultimately Sega in general, is what would shape me as a gamer."

This started a lifelong love of Sega, and we asked Trevor when he first started collecting. "I was usually pretty good at hanging on to some of the older stuff I had when I was younger, so part of the retro collection was already there, thankfully. Around the mid-2000's, when I started to watch early gaming YouTubers such as the Angry Video Game Nerd, is when I really started to take note of older games."

Trevor then explains what is important to him when considering a purchase. "Condition is a big one. I'll typically wash cartridge games and clean the pins when I get a new one. I like to have games on the shelf that look nice. I'm also picky about whether a game is complete with its manual, so that's something else I look for a lot. Rarity usually isn't a focus for me as I buy games I want to play and enjoy."

Speaking of games to play and enjoy, what are some of Trevor's favourites in his collection? "That's tough as there are so many to choose from," he admits. "If I had to pick just a generalised top five, it would probably be *Sonic 3 & Knuckles*, *Yakuza 0*, *Persona 3*, *Panzer Dragoon II Zwei* and *Phantasy Star IV*," he explains. "*Sonic The Hedgehog 3* is one of my earliest memories, and it's the game that defines the Genesis in everything that made the system great, with fantastic visuals and amazing music."

We also asked Trevor why he feels collecting retro games is so popular today. "I think there's always a trend of people who grew up with a specific console generation, and as they become older, some of them get nostalgic to go back as they now have their own money to re-experience their youth. I feel like we've recently been seeing that a lot with the PlayStation 3 and the Xbox 360, and in several more years, the same will happen with the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One."

Are there any games that Trevor is currently on the lookout for? "Honestly, it's hard to say, as there are still quite a few I'd love to add to my collection, and there are always a few new gems I'm either discovering or ones I initially didn't think I'd particularly care for that I suddenly feel the urge to purchase. I know in the last several years I've been getting more into imports, which have grown into a big part of my collection, and I'll likely continue to seek out interesting import games from Japan."

We finish up by asking Trevor what the Grail for his collection would be. "*Panzer Dragoon Saga*, mainly because I'd love to have it to round out the *Panzer Dragoon* section of my collection. It's a shame it's so expensive these days."

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com retrogamermag.bsky.social

OUTRUN 20TH ANNIVERSARY BOX

"Imported from Japan. I love *Outrun* and its music, especially *2006: Coast 2 Coast*. I even did a video not too long back, just talking a little about it, as I've never seen anyone really show it off, so I don't think this is a really known piece."

AMOUNT PAID: $85

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: STRANGE JOURNEY REDUX BOX SET

■ "This is one of the earlier Atlus titles released by Sega, and is just stacked with great items such as the book and soundtracks, which include all of the mainline games' OSTs up to this point."

PAID: $150

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

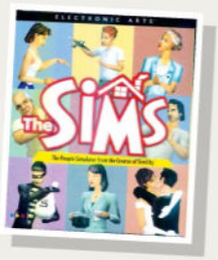
THE COVER STAR

DIZZY (AMSTRAD CPC)

There's no need to get yourself in a spin or tizzy as picking up a complete version of this adventure classic will cost under **£10.**

COLONY WARS (PLAYSTATION)

Good condition copies of this PlayStation release sell for **£10,** although used copies can be had for under **£5** occasionally.



THE SIMS (PC)

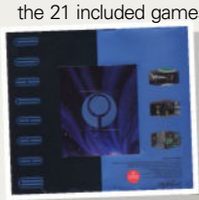
Big box collectors can live cheaply for **£15,** while frugal homemakers should bulk-buy a *Sims* bundle with the expansions.

PERFECT DARK (NINTENDO 64)

If you want to experience Joanna Dark's first adventure it shouldn't be too expensive. Loose carts can be snuck upon for **£15,** but good condition, complete copies hit as high as **£50** depending on condition.

SUPER PUNCH-OUT!! (SNES)

Punch above your weight with a **£35** loose cart or take on the champ with a complete copy for **£100.** Alternatively, there's the option to grab a SNES Classic Mini, as it's one of the 21 included games. That will cost you around **£80.**



MARATHON (MAC)

Saving for this is a marathon, more than a sprint as Bungie's game is now becoming very expensive to purchase. Copies sell between **£80** and **£250** depending on the edition. If that's too much, there's a free version called *Classic Marathon* on Steam.

PATAPON (PSP)

Copies for this charming rhythm game can be bought for around **£15.** Those not in a rush should seek out the Greatest Hits version, which is even cheaper.

SENSIBLE SOCCER (AMIGA)

You won't need a Premier League salary to afford a copy of Sensible Software's excellent footy game, as boxed copies sell for as little as **£5.** That's worth celebrating!

HOW MUCH?!

PC ENGINE LT

This boxed PC Engine LT handheld has a small screen with a high price, costing the buyer **£3,800** during a recent online sale.

Prices correct at time of print

» It's easy to lose the screws that hold the peripheral together so be sure to ask for them. This blue-button version shows it's the reissue that came with *Line Of Contact*. Note the eject button in the top-right corner, it's very important.

» [Xbox] It's certainly expensive to buy, but *Steel Battalion* remains one of the most unique experiences on Microsoft's console.

STEEL BATTALION

As ambitious as it was costly, Capcom's Steel Battalion was a highly desirable pick-up for any original Xbox owner, and it remains an expensive grail for most collectors today

Words by Darran Jones

IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **» DEVELOPER:** NUDE MAKER/CAPCOM PRODUCTION STUDIO 4
- **» PLATFORM:** XBOX
- **» RELEASED:** 2002
- **» PRICE TODAY:** £220+

» It's rare to find the game itself on its own, as it's impossible to play without its accompanying peripheral.

THE GAME

Steel Battalion caused quite the stir on release and seemed to be born out of madness rather than necessity. After all, the Xbox's footprint in the Japanese market was tiny at the time, so Capcom's decision to make it exclusive to Microsoft's console caused plenty of head-scratching. And that's before you consider the gigantic, cumbersome peripheral that was needed to play it, which featured an astonishing array of buttons and switches and had to be assembled, due to its sheer size.

Needless to say, Capcom's game was not a success financially, but it did seem to click with those that were lucky enough to afford it and if you can track it down today, you'll find it to be an incredibly immersive experience. *Steel Battalion* has you controlling a VT, or Vertical Tank, a gigantic mech that comes in various forms, from fast-moving scout units, to lumbering assault models. As play continues you'll gain access to all these different mechs and must complete a variety of missions that range from sinking a huge battleship to scouting out enemy bases and protecting transport from a seemingly never-ending horde of enemies.

While there's not a huge amount of variety to be found in *Steel Battalion*, where it really wins is with the immersion it offers. Only a small amount of screen estate shows the world outside your mech and the large number of controller options you need to connect with pulls you deeper into Nude Maker's game.

THE QUALITY

Steel Battalion was relatively well received on release, although Edge wasn't quite as enamoured as everyone else, criticising the weak AI of friendly VTs and the general lack of variety in the game's missions in its 6/10 review. Eurogamer was also unimpressed with the game's friendly AI, the fact that saves were so easily lost and the poor pop-up that featured in the game, awarding it the same 6/10 score and saying, "On the whole, *Steel Battalion* just doesn't feel like it's worth £129.99."

IGN's 8.3/10 review was a lot more positive, with reviewer Aaron

» [Xbox] *Steel Battalion*'s had a permadeath feature. Fail to hit the eject button in time and you'd lose all your progress!

Boulding stating, "I've often felt some popular games are more cool than fun, and *Steel Battalion* ends up taking a premise that we're all pretty familiar with and draping it with more coolness than three little Fonzies." *Electronic Gaming Monthly* also scored *Steel Battalion* highly, with an 8.5/10 review highlighting the weak AI but maintaining that Capcom's game "offers an experience like no other".

WHY IT'S EXPENSIVE

Steel Battalion was an expensive item on release, so it stands to reason that not everyone could afford or justify its high cost. While it had relatively strong scores at the time, mech games in general weren't necessarily huge sellers, and the ones that were popular didn't require an excessively large peripheral to enjoy. Add in a low print run and the fact that only one other game supported the peripheral (the online-based *Steel Battalion: Line Of Fire*) and you have all the ingredients required for the game to explode in price on the second-hand market.

CHEAPER ALTERNATIVES

There are no easy ways to enjoy *Steel Battalion* today as it remains exclusive to Microsoft's first console. However, there are similar games out there. *Armoured Core* is very popular, but it's a series where all its games are typically in high demand, so they're often expensive to buy. There are a number of mech-based games on both the Xbox and later consoles and most of them are cheap, although they won't necessarily offer the same immersive experience as *Steel Battalion*. The two *MechAssault* games and Battle Engine Aquila are all under £10, while *Chromehounds* on the Xbox 360 is also worth a punt at under £3. Just be aware that all these games offer a more arcade-like experience. The Xbox 360 Kinect sequel *Steel Battalion: Heavy Armor* is cheap, but sadly isn't very good.

» Xbox] Certain missions take place at night, which makes exploring very atmospheric.

» [Xbox] All those numbers aren't just there for show. Pay attention to them and be sure to eject if you get in trouble.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Steel Battalion is certainly not a cheap game to buy nowadays, and the sheer size of its required controller will be enough to put many off buying it. If you do want to take the plunge though, we'd argue that you'll most likely get your money's worth from it. Even today it offers an experience that's quite unmatched and while gameplay can get repetitive, it remains a lot of fun.

I'VE GOT IT!

The readers who own Steel Battalion

Miked1112
I bought it at retail on launch day, which if I recall was like $250 in the US. I still have it and my sons run the *Steel Battalion* tournament at every Pax East and West.

Ross Taylor
I bought it while I worked at Game so I'd have had 20% off the retail price. The best bit though, is that I've kept the outer box that most shops would have thrown away. This was Capcom-branded with the *Steel Battalion* logo on the side.

Kaiju Wasp
£150 in pristine condition from a co-worker at PlayStation in 2017. It included the first version of the controller with the green buttons and had been hardly used. Absolute bargain!

Gus
I bought it used from a Gamestop a couple of years after it came out. I remember buying it with *Line Of Contact* for about $200. Still the only game I ever played on Xbox live.

TIMtheTOON
At the Retro Gaming Con in Pasadena, a vendor wanted $300 for the controller and game (no box). He kept dropping the price by $20 because he really didn't want to carry it home.

The Last Ginja
I bought it on day one. I was fascinated by the permadeath aspect. Until I got further in and missed the eject... now it gathers dust in my loft ready to pay for some of my retirement.

Zocksofa
Bought mine at ProMarkt in Berlin. They received one box and I was the first customer. I paid 199 Euros if I remember correctly. But I sold it years ago, it took up too much space.

ONE YEAR OF SWITCH 2

Martyn reflects on the console's first 12 months

The Switch 2 arrived just over a year ago, in June 2025, and I picked one up on launch day. For me, the original Switch is easily one of my top three consoles. It's had tons of use in our house over the years, from every member of the family, and due to its portability it always came away with us on trips and holidays. So it wasn't just the new tech appeal that prompted me to get a Switch 2 on day one – this was an investment for the family, not just me. As I write this, I sheepishly look over to the PlayStation 5 Pro in the corner of the room. Now that was an 'ooh shiny' purchase.

I was surprised at the inflated cost of some Switch 2 software, but when games were going to be as good as *Mario Kart World*, did it really matter? Besides, I got the Switch 2 bundle that came with *Mario Kart World*. And now, a year later, that launch game remains the only Switch 2 exclusive title I own. I've been meaning to pick up *Donkey Kong Bananza* for some time, and *Yoshi And The Mysterious Book* is on my wish list, but still, that's hardly a glowing endorsement for exclusive Switch 2 software. The console itself is not gathering dust, however. As owners will know, when you upgrade it basically takes all of the content from your Switch and dumps it onto the Switch 2, rendering the original console largely obsolete. So basically we've just been playing all our favourite Switch games. Looking at the play time clocked up on our Switch 2 this past year, the most time has been spent playing *Luigi's Mansion 2 HD*, *Tomodachi Life* and *Mario Kart 8 Deluxe* – all standard Switch games. We have played quite a bit of *Mario Kart World*, but when it comes to four-player, split-screen gaming, *Mario Kart 8 Deluxe* always gets the nod.

Talking of refinement – what I do love is how Nintendo has used the Switch 2 hardware to improve many existing Switch games. People always cite Microsoft as the champions of backwards compatibility, but Nintendo has excellent form here, going right back to the Game Boy Color not only playing original Game Boy games, but adding dedicated colour palettes to certain titles. One of the revelations has been returning to Hyrule in the Switch 2 Edition of *The Legend Of Zelda: Tears Of The Kingdom* and seeing the world transformed by its 60fps, HDR presentation. OK, so that was a paid upgrade, but the free patches that have addressed the framerate issues in later Switch titles like *The Legend Of Zelda: Echoes Of Wisdom* and *Super Mario 3D World + Bowser's Fury* are most welcome. In addition, the system-wide enhancements to all unpatched Switch software – including the recent System Boost Mode, which improves the performance of many undocked games – shows that Nintendo is treating backwards compatibility with the regard it deserves.

It is cool to see Capcom and others supporting the Switch 2 with games like the more recent *Resident Evil* titles. [Shame they are on Game-Key Cards – Ed] I've also enjoyed many of the *Arcade Archives 2* releases, particularly those updates of Namco's Nineties coin-ops. But these games are also available – and are often cheaper – on other systems. For me, and most likely you I suspect, the true appeal of the Switch has been the access to games I can't get anywhere else. I can't really see the point in getting both a PS5 and an Xbox Series S/X, but owning a Switch 2 alongside either of those makes absolute sense.

I'm positive the Switch 2's second and third years will feature many more exclusives that will make owning the console mandatory. The new *Star Fox* game has just landed and June's Nintendo Direct presentation showed a lot of promise, unveiling a strong list of upcoming exclusives. I'm sure you'll have your own thoughts on games you'd love to see on the Switch 2, but surely a new 3D *Mario* adventure and a return to the *F-Zero* universe will be on many most wanted lists. I'd love to see a new *Super Mario Maker* that supports the features introduced in *Super Mario Bros Wonder* as well. Let's see what happens.

> "I've enjoyed many of the Arcade Archives 2 releases, particularly those updates of Namco's Nineties coin-ops"
> **MARTYN CARROLL**

SWITCH 2 HIGHLIGHTS

WHAT I LOVE ABOUT NINTENDO'S NEW CONSOLE

SWITCH 2 EDITIONS
Any excuse to play games like *The Legend Of Zelda: Tears Of The Kingdom* and *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* all over again.

PERFORMANCE UPGRADES
The Digital Foundry fan in me loves to see original Switch games given resolution and framerate bumps.

GAMECUBE CLASSICS
There's no new *F-Zero*, but you can play *GX* and a few other GameCube games as part of the expanded Nintendo Classics offering.

NEW JOY-CONS
If you've upgraded from the Switch, you already know how much better the new magnetic controllers are.

THE SWITCH 2 SCREEN
I mainly play docked, but the new 1080p, 120Hz screen is really nice.

[SWITCH 2] THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TEARS OF THE KINGDOM SOMETIMES STRUGGLES ON THE SWITCH, BUT IT'S BUTTERY SMOOTH ON THE SWITCH 2.
[SWITCH 2] GAMECUBE CLASSICS ARE AN EXCELLENT ADDITION IF YOU'RE A NINTENDO SWITCH ONLINE MEMBER.
I CURRENTLY HAVE AROUND 30 PHYSICAL SWITCH GAMES. WILL I EVER HAVE AS MANY SWITCH 2 GAMES?

I THINK IT'S FAIR TO SAY THAT THE POPULARITY OF THE SWITCH 2 HASN'T EXPLODED LIKE A BOB-OMB.
IF YOU'RE NOT SURE WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR OLD SWITCH, YOU COULD ALWAYS LOAD IT UP WITH RETRO GAMES AND STICK IT IN A CHEAP ARCADE-STYLE CAB.
[SWITCH 2] IT'S GREAT TO REVISIT GAMES LIKE F-ZERO GX. IT STILL LOOKS STUNNING, MORE THAN 20 YEARS AFTER IT'S DEBUT.
[SWITCH 2] UNCONVERTED NO MORE! NAMCO'S RAVE RACER WAS RECENTLY RELEASED AS PART OF HAMSTER'S ARCADE ARCHIVES 2 RANGE.
[SWITCH 2] MARIO KART WORLD IS EXCELLENT... BUT MARIO KART 8 DELUXE HAS SET THE BAR SO VERY HIGH.

READERS REACT

What games do you really want to see on the Switch 2?

Lee Jackson
A new *Sin & Punishment*, or at least a remaster of *Star Successor*. I need some of that classic Treasure action on the Switch 2.

Dan Whitehead
A new *Stunt Race FX*. And *Ring Fit Adventure 2*.

PJ Montgomery
A brand-new *F-Zero* title. Replaying *GX* on the GameCube app has given me the itch.

Cabbagelad
I'd love to see a new *Hotel Dusk*. I think it's ripe for either a remake or new entry, especially after *Another Code: Recollection* and *Dear Me, I Was...*

Tom Regan
Bayonetta 4, an all-new *Smash Bros*, 2D *Metroid*, and an utterly joyous original 3D *Mario*.

Psi/Ben
I'd love a new 3D *Mario* as most folks do, but who I want to see more is Wario. Preferably a *Wario Land* but I'll take another attempt at a *Wario World*.

Ben W
At long, long last, a *Pokémon* MMO. Thirty years on, it's long overdue.

Thomas
I'd love to see a third *Golden Sun* game. It was a shame Camelot only made two for the GBA and then no other games after that. Definitely not one on the Nintendo DS. Ah well.

Distant Arcade
A new *Golden Sun* game. I know it may not happen but I will not stop saying this until it happens.

Bennet87
I really only bought it for the upcoming *Fire Emblem* game. I'm not into *Mario, Zelda, Donkey Kong*, or any of the other big hitters, sadly. I'll probably regret purchasing it in the long run, but I'm excited for *Fire Emblem* for now.

Zero
I think it's time to put Master System games on Nintendo Switch Online. Or Dreamcast, since I think the Switch 2 is more than capable.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA – **TWITTER.COM/RETROGAMER_MAG**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a copy of one of our classic retro books from our archives. Good luck everyone!

» [Mega Drive] It's mad to think that Tim and Dave could have been visiting the same shop as youngsters.

STAR LETTER

ONE GOOD DEED

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
I just wanted to say how much I love reading your magazine and thank you to all the team.

In your most recent mag there was a section on items which people had picked up second hand. About ten years ago, I was in the charity shop near my work when I spotted a *Brütal Legend* statue. I had never played the game but instantly recognised it and messaged a friend back at the office to tell him what I had found and did he want it? He was impressed and eagerly accepted the offer so I bought it for £15 and brought it back to the office where he reimbursed me. It was then that I discovered there were only 1,000 of these ever made! I couldn't ask for it back but this haunts me to this day, that the best thing I have ever found in a charity shop I gave away! I recently saw that someone paid the equivalent of £836 including postage on eBay. I guess I have to take comfort that I did a nice thing for a friend.

Anyway, thanks again and keep up the good work!!
David Wright

What a lovely thing you did for a friend, David. We know it's a very small consolation prize, but have a book for doing a very good thing.

» Here's the statue that David mentioned. Only 1,000 were ever produced, hence its rarity.

COMFORT WITH GAIN GROUND

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Tim's Retro Revival on *Gain Ground* brought back a lot of memories for me. Like Tim, I too grew up in 'Troubles era' Northern Ireland and *Gain Ground* was a game that I played a lot! I'd play it for hours with my buddy Pete, who would meticulously plan a route for us through each stage and I'd blunder in and lose most of our party on a single screen. Great times!

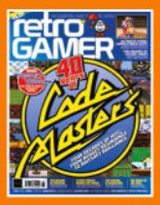
The other memory it evoked was my uncle's shop, I vaguely recall Tim saying previously that he bought something from the FC Computers branch in the Craigavon Shopping Centre. I'm not sure if it was my uncle's shop he was renting Mega Drive games from but it triggered some fine memories of working in the Lurgan branch during my summer holidays. Spending all day being surrounded by the computers, consoles and games and getting to talk about my hobby was the best job I ever had by an absolute mile. If I'm ever in a new town or city I always try to track down any independent retro emporiums for a quick mooch around. Good luck to them for keeping the spirit of those shops of yesteryear alive in the modern commercial world.
All the best,
Dave

Thanks so much for sharing your memories with us, Dave. We're glad Tim's piece resonated with you and you'll be seeing a few more pieces from him in the coming months.

OVERJOYED WITH OVERBOARD!

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Reading issue 287 and finding a full-on piece covering *Overboard!* brought me a joy I haven't experienced in a long time. I got a PlayStation in 1997 and *Overboard!* was one of the first games I ever got – along with *Rapid Racer*, another cruelly ignored game. While I played *Crash Bandicoot* and *Spyro* and other major classics, and *Final Fantasy VII* basically led me to loving narratives and my eventual path into teaching English, it is *Overboard!* (and other quirky games like *Kula World*, *Tombi* and *Kurushi*) which cemented my love for the PlayStation brand. While I have shrunk my collection (and rebuilt it!) over the years, *Overboard!* has never left it. I had

» [PlayStation] Darran once rented *Overboard!* for six weeks in a row. He should have just bought it.



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the same feeling when you covered *Casper* not long ago, which is also a major nostalgic game for me! I would love to see other quirky PlayStation titles like *Nightmare Creatures* or *RC Stunt Copter* covered in the future – and I'll be there waiting! Thank you for a brilliant magazine.
Paul Matthias

We're so glad you liked the feature Paul. It's a personal favourite of Martyn's so he's delighted to know how much you enjoyed reading it.

THE LEGACY OF THE COMMODORE 64!
THE COMMODORE 64 MAY HAVE RESEMBLED A VIC-20, BUT INSIDE ITS DRAB BEIGE CASE LAY AN 8-BIT POWERHOUSE THAT WOULD DOMINATE THE COMPUTER GAME INDUSTRY AND CREATE A LASTING LEGACY. JOIN US AS WE INVITE KEY FIGURES TO EXAMINE THE C64'S IMPACT AND ITS CONTINUED POPULARITY
WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL
MICROPROSE
THE ACTION IS SIMULATED THE EXCITEMENT IS REAL!
Commodore Creatives

» There was a lot of love for the C64 feature in issue 286. Who wants an Amstrad one?

WHEN I'M 64

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Thank you for the superb The Legacy Of The Commodore 64 article, which brought a nostalgic tear to my eye! The C64 was the first 'real' computer I owned and introduced me to the likes of prolific composer Rob Hubbard (the *Zoids* theme is still one of my all-time favourite tunes!), plus the games of Julian Gollop, Andrew Braybrook, Jeff Minter and Gary Grigsby. Who can forget Kevin Toms with his best-selling and pioneering *Football Manager*? I even dabbled with *The Graphic Adventure Creator* and *Wargame Construction Kit*, among others. Happy days indeed!
Regards,
Stuart Hardy

Martyn's recent cover feature seems to have really resonated with readers, so we're glad that you enjoyed it as well, Stuart. In fact, the format has been so successful that we'll most likely run a similar feature for the Amstrad next.

A COOL COLLECTION

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
I thought I would put myself forward for Collectors Corner. Though my collection may be a bit too niche as it is just compilations for the ZX Spectrum. I have over 180 of them now and run a website dedicated to Speccy compilations. If you think it might be of interest let me know.
Gordon Sinclair

The collection looks great, Gordon. We'll be sure to share it with readers in a later issue.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Sony ends physical support

Although Martyn was on holiday when the news of Sony's plans were revealed, he did have time to share a sad emoji face with us. The news that *GTA VI* would be a digital-only release was bad enough, but this is clearly a step too far for many gamers and we've been constantly discussing it since Sony's bold news first dropped. If the price of Sony's PS6 wasn't already putting us off getting one, this feels like the final nail in the coffin.

» You can find more about Gordon's collection (including the compilations he still needs) by heading on over to compilationzx.com

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your take on Sony stopping physical games?

Chris Jowett
One of the things I enjoy about gaming is collecting physical media. Even if I have a game digitally, I will always try and purchase a boxed disc version. Sad times…

Whirlwound
If purchasing isn't 'permanent' ownership, then piracy isn't theft.

strange_hero
I now have zero reason to purchase a PlayStation 6.

Chris Hack
I'm not against this entirely, but Sony needs to start including a decent amount of storage in their consoles. 1TB just doesn't cut it anymore.

Lee Jackson
Not the best news to announce after they just deleted hundreds of movies from users' digital libraries.

Alex Adkins
Bad. So bad. The games industry really is trying to make me hate it so much recently.

Peter Armstrong
My reaction is that I'm glad I kept so many games from past generations. Looks like I'm mostly going to be a retro gamer in future years to come.

Robb from 8/16/32bit
This is how they kill the preowned games market they have wanted dead for years.

Anthony Henderson
Shrinkflation for the gaming community. Charging the same price for nothing in hand. It will cost gaming retail jobs and kill any resale market. I guess that's the idea.

Alcade
It's no surprise, but there needs to be guarantees you'll be able to play the games you 'purchased'.

Breakdown
This may be my exit from modern gaming. The reaction from fans and game makers seems to be mostly opposed to the move. Sony must like making some of the dumbest announcements, as they seem to shoot themselves in the foot quite a bit.

» Are Collector Editions going to be as desirable if they only include a digital code? We'll have to wait and see.

retro GAMER

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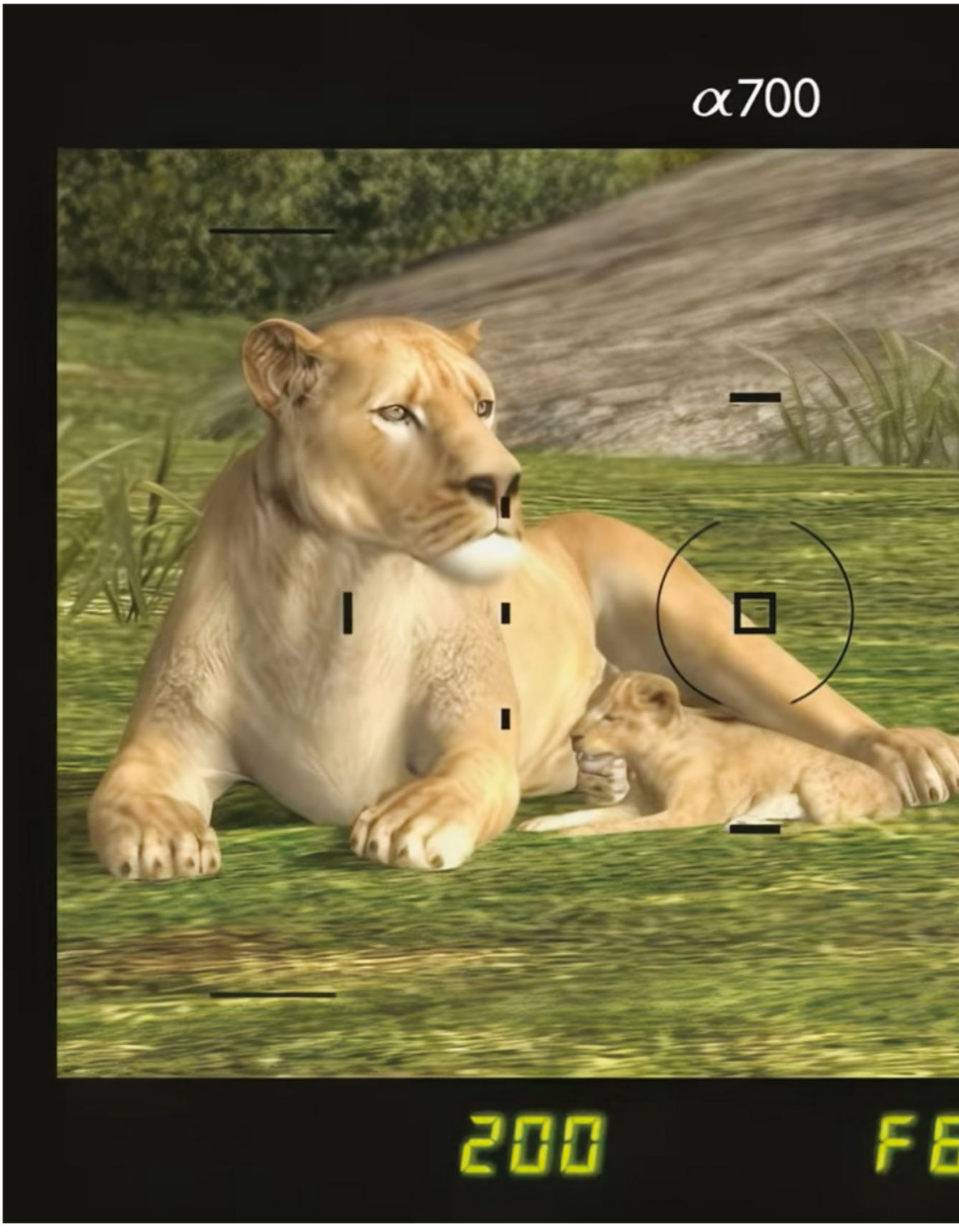
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Afrika

IT'S GONNA TAKE A LOT TO DRAG ME AWAY FROM YOU

RETROREVIVAL

» PLAYSTATION 3 » 2008 » RHINO STUDIOS

Exclusives are the bread and butter of any console and one of the things that undoubtedly drive sales of them. The PlayStation 3 was no exception and had a number of essential early exclusives that ranged from *Uncharted* and *Motorstorm* to *Resistance* and *Heavenly Sword*. Aside from *Uncharted*, few of those early exclusives really sung to me. *Resistance* was mechanically uninteresting, *Motorstorm* felt too slight with its content, while *Heavenly Sword* looked stunning but had exceptionally dull combat.

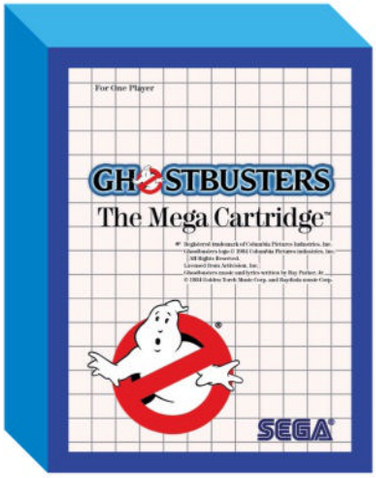
I bought my PS3 in 2008 but it wasn't because of *Grand Theft Auto IV*, *Metal Gear Solid 4*, *LittleBigPlanet* or BioShock. No, I bought it because of Rhino Studios' *Afrika*, a game I had to import from the States because it never received its promised European release, and it was worth every penny.

I'm not sure why *Afrika* never debuted in Europe, but I can see why Sony may have pulled the plug on it (after publishing it in Japan, the US rights were picked up by Natsume). For all its impressive-looking visuals, it's an incredibly basic game, requiring very little from you. Playing as an aspiring photojournalist, you must take pictures of the African wildlife. Initially you'll be asked for standard shots, but as play continues requests will become more specific, from catching a lioness lounging with her cubs, to snapping a dynamic photo of duelling hippos or a hunting cheetah.

Good shots will see you rewarded with cash, which you can then use to upgrade your equipment, hopefully allowing for even more ambitious snaps. That's pretty much the game right there and it's as simple as it sounds. And yet there's something about *Afrika* that I can't help but love. I adore the life-like mannerisms and animations of the featured animals, bustling around the African savannah is good fun and the orchestral score by Wataru Hokoyama reminds me of *Jurassic Park*'s. I'm also a sucker for collecting things, whether it's the best-possible picture of each animal, or completing all the entries of the *National Geographic*-sponsored Animal Library.

Afrika might not be the greatest PS3 game in the world, but when most developers were obsessed with cutting-edge FPSes and challenging open-world adventures, I fell in love with a game that simply felt so different to everything else that was on the console. ✱

ENDGAME



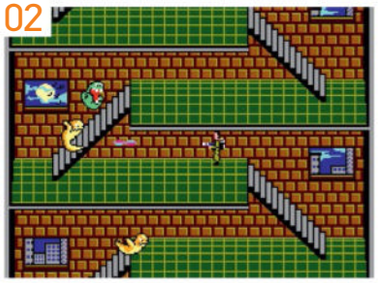
GHOSTBUSTERS
(1987, MASTER SYSTEM)

» The home-computer versions of Activision's *Ghostbusters* game were a little anticlimactic. You reached the Zuul building, sneaked past the Marshmallow Man, and it... just ended. The Master System version from Compile wasn't about to go out like that

01

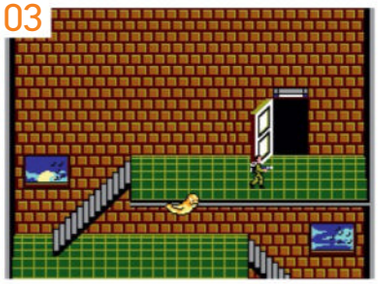
» You arrive at Spook Central moments after the Gatekeeper and Keymaster. As expected, the jolly old Marshmallow Man is bouncing up and down in front of the entrance, blocking your way. Using careful timing, you must sneak your men through the front door.

02



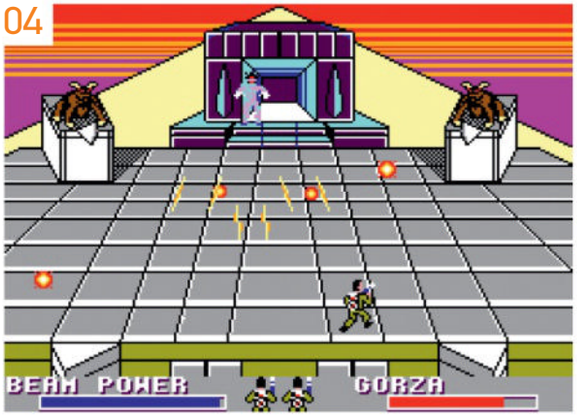
» Hang on, this is different from the computer versions. You're now inside the building's stairwell – and it's teeming with Rovers and Slimers. The game suddenly shifts into a run-and-gun, with you using your proton pack to zap the spooks as you climb.

03



» As you reach the upper levels, you encounter faster Slimers and even Rovers that fling deadly dishes at you. One hit and it's back to the ground floor. Persevere and you'll reach the door to the rooftop, where the final encounter with Gorza awaits.

04

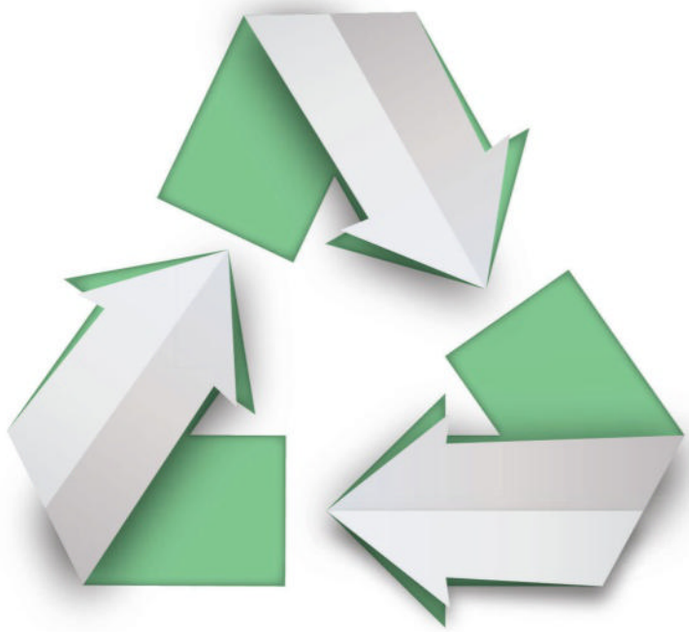


» Gorza? That's right. Things got lost in translation. Whatever its name, the evil deity has ascended to final boss status, complete with a health bar! There's no crossing the streams. This is a straight-up firefight against the boss and the two Terror Dogs.

05

CONGRATULATIONS!
WE THANK YOU FROM THE BOTTOM OF OUR HEARTS.
YOU HAVE SAVED THE CITY AND WILL GO DOWN IN HISTORY AS THE HERO WHO ANNIHILATED GORZA, THE GOD OF DESTRUCTION.

» When Gorza's health is finally chipped away, the game cuts to a slime-green end-message screen. Your Ghostbusting business is awarded $5,000 for your efforts. Thanks for the lowball offer, New York City. Good job that bustin' makes us feel good.



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